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HALO 3
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REVEALED
PS3, 360, Wii
The triple-A titles that will redefine gaming



"I'm not going after *GT4* with *Forza 2*, I don't care about *GT4*"
Dan Greenawalt, Lead Designer

180 PAGES OF FAST & FURIOUS GAMING

PREVIEWED
ASSASSIN'S CREED
Ubisoft's PS3 stunner

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TLOZ: TWILIGHT PRINCESS [MULTI] SPORE [PC] TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8 [MULTI]
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eMag

Bill Gates… What an incredibly dull speaker. No, really. After initially being knocked for six at Microsoft's E3 Media Briefing by a jaw-dropping opening demo of *Gears Of War*, on popped a surprise appearance from Mr Microsoft who proceeded to bore us to near submission (or perhaps that's his plan) when unveiling Live Anywhere – it took the megabyte billionaire 30 minutes of monotonic techno-babble before a colleague summarised it on one slide and in one sentence. Equally, while we expected SCEA's Media Briefing to blow us away, aside from a couple of impressive trailers and a demo of *Heavenly Sword*, we left feeling somewhat underwhelmed, a feeling shared by many. It was only the lukewarm reception of the motion-tilt controller that provided any real talking points. Thankfully, the fanboys at the Nintendo Media Briefing provided the rabid whooping that was oddly absent from the other briefings – with the announcements of new *Zelda*, *Mario*, *Metroid* and more. But what did these briefings tell us? Well, the close of 2006 is looking good, but 2007 is looking great and thank the gaming gods for third-party releases. As for what left a lasting impression on me, let me just say *Gears Of War*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Rainbow Six: Vegas* and… Ultimate Margaritas – but not in a good way.

Paul Morgan
Editor




10300 HI
SPEED UP
DOUBLE
LASER


OPTION
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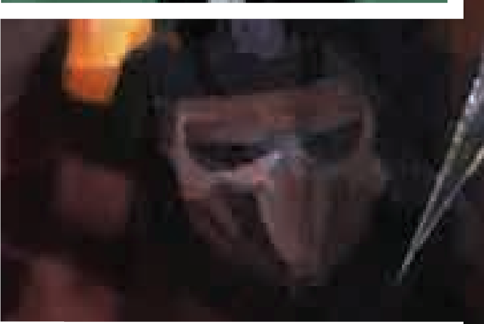
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

HALO 3 AND GRAND THEFT AUTO IV LEAD MICROSOFT'S TWIN E3 ASSAULT

With all the focus on Nintendo and Sony before this year's Electronics Entertainment Expo, Microsoft knew that it had its work cut out to win over the crowd during its pre-show press conference. Thankfully for the Seattle-based monolith, it had a little trick up its sleeve. Literally. In a direct reference to 2004's show and the *Halo 2* tattoo incident, Xbox VP Peter Moore peeled back his shirtsleeve to reveal another piece of inkwork, emblazoned with the simple words 'Grand Theft Auto IV'. Three words and one number that have more impact in this industry than perhaps anything else.

Apart from, of course, *Halo 3*. Promptly after the *Grand Theft Auto* announcement, Microsoft revealed a superbly rousing trailer featuring everybody's favourite Spartan, Master Chief, a barren desert landscape and an armada of Banshees flying below an enormous Covenant dropship. All signs point to the trailer, and indeed the game, taking place on a Covenant-occupied earth, given the climax of *Halo 2* and a number of signifiers in the trailer which has already set the Internet alight with conjecture about Master Chief's third outing. The words 'Finish The Fight 2007' lit up the enormous screen to the accompaniment of Martin O'Donnell's striking score, and without showing any genuine gameplay footage (although Microsoft assures us that the footage is all using the in-game engine) *Halo 3* stole the entire conference.

This double impact from Microsoft, along with a host of stunning-looking trailers and demos (*Gears Of War*, especially) meant many attendees walked out of the conference far more buoyant than they had arrived. The green giant certainly knows how to put on a show, and the news that *GTA* is set to appear on 360 from "day one" (19 October 2007 in Europe) is surely a massive blow to Sony. The *GTA* brand had previously been synonymous with PlayStation, and the announcement really stamps Microsoft's intent: second place is not good enough.

Further cementing Microsoft's commitment, Peter Moore confirmed that Microsoft has signed an exclusivity deal with Rockstar to provide episodic content over Xbox Live, although no mention was made that it would be specific to *GTA*, but on the other hand no mention was made that it definitely wouldn't. Clever wordplay from Moore who's claim that people could play *GTAIV* "first" on Xbox 360 led to all kinds of confusion. Internet speculation was rife that Microsoft had sealed a full exclusivity, and was only quashed when Rockstar's press release confirmed that PS3 and 360 would receive the game on the same day.

All in all, though, Microsoft's conference was indisputably impressive. With strong support for the new Windows platform Vista, a further reassurance of the commitment to 360, and the unveiling of a number of hardware peripherals, the next year looks rosy for Gates and co.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE NEXT GENERATION OF 360 PERIPHERALS REVEALED

XBOX LIVE VISION

The camera may look ugly, but it's all about functionality

The Xbox 360 webcam is one of the worst kept secrets we can remember, but E3 gave us the first glimpse of what could be an excellent addition to the Xbox Live experience. Entitled 'Vision' the camera supports images up to VGA 640 x 480 at 30fps, and can take 1.3 mega pixel still photographs. Microsoft is promising full videochat integration while gamers play (presumably using Picture-In-Picture technology), as well as EyeToy-style functionality. Yes, you can finally put your face onto characters in *Perfect Dark Zero*, or take advantage of the huge number (read: zero) of "next-gen online motion-detection-enabled games". As expected, the camera includes a microphone for voice recognition and chat, and will appear around Christmas time. No word on what it will cost, but expect it to retail for under £50 to avoid pricing itself out of the market.

HD-DVD DRIVE



It's like a mini Xbox 360. Lovely.

Looking like a miniature Xbox 360, and again hitting the market in time for Christmas is Microsoft's answer to PS3's Blu-ray compatibility, the HD DVD drive, which also made its debut at the pre-E3 conference. Small, compact, and according to Microsoft "affordable", the machine looks set to deliver on its promises – playing HD DVDs – but the concern that Toshiba's format is dead before it even hits the market is definitely prevalent. Still, that's a battle that will wage in the future. A USB connected HD DVD drive will probably turn a few people away from PlayStation3, although not in the numbers Microsoft would probably like.

LIVE ANYWHERE



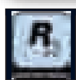
Soon you won't even have to move to get on Xbox Live.

Perhaps the most interesting non-software announcement of Microsoft's conference, and a strong indication of the company's future plans, Gates himself appeared on stage to explain the company's latest charge into the inevitability of homogeneity – Live Anywhere. A simple premise, it'll allow PC and mobile users to take advantage of Xbox Live features, and allow 360 and PC owners to play against each other online. No port forwarding, no IP configuration, just PC versus 360, as easy as 360 vs 360. The *Forza 2* team provided an exciting example of the possibilities of Live Anywhere. Racing on the 360, trading cars over a mobile phone then painting the bodywork using a PC and mouse, before taking the car back online on the 360. Genius. Soon, gamers will never have to move again; access to every aspect of modern life will be little more than an arm's length away.

DATA STREAM

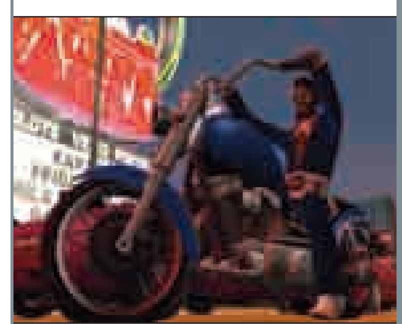
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



OH VIENNA

TakeTwo has confirmed the closure of Rockstar Vienna, developer of *GTA* for Xbox. The decision comes after sales fell during the period between current and next-gen hardware. Around a hundred jobs hang in the balance, but Rockstar is committed to finding new work for former employees. A spokesperson verified the news, stating, "Employees will be offered packages in accordance with Austrian law, as well as other job opportunities within TakeTwo and Rockstar Games where possible".





GOODBYE GBA

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata announced that the firm will not be producing any more versions of the GBA. The handheld shifted over 74 million units in all its guises, but with DS to consider and the launch of Wii fast approaching, Nintendo has decided it would not be productive to give the GBA an overhaul. "The Japanese game market is now evolving around DS. We don't need to do something that will pour cold water on the situation," Iwata asserted.





PLAYSTATION REVOLUTION

SONY'S E3 CONFERENCE WAS A LITTLE SUBDUED, BUT THERE WERE SOME EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENTS…



■ This 'clear black' version will be the only model available at launch across the world.

■ Pictured here, the new Dual-Shock-esque tilt-sensitive controller and the model as showcased at the conference.

Compared with Nintendo's flagrant fan service and Microsoft's sheer American bravado, Sony's conference was quite subdued. Kaz Hirai, SCEA's boss, took the stage for much of the two-hour-long conference, breaking up a near-endless slew of pro-Sony statistics with two trailer reels, various real-time PS3 demos and perhaps the biggest surprise announcement of E3: the revelation that PS3's controller will have tilt functionality allowing players to control games through waving the pad around in a manner not entirely unlike Nintendo's Wii controller, as noted by many of the company's detractors.

Much of the conference focused on PS3, with little more than a cursory mention of PS2, and few exciting PSP announcements. Hirai revealed Sony's plans to implement a simultaneous worldwide launch for the console, although concerns for the viability of such a strategy were evident following the botched Xbox 360 launch and in light of the console's shocking price point of $599.

Following announcements of the machine's launch and final specs, Kazunori Yamauchi took to the stage to demo *Gran Turismo* HD – a version of *GT4* updated to take advantage of PS3 technology. Although it was clearly just *GT4* under the layers of HD prettiness, the demonstration looked stunning – Hirai was keen to emphasise the tiny load times and consistent 60fps frame rate. Yamauchi rounded things off by announcing that he hoped to bring a new *Gran Turismo* title to PS3 shortly after launch – a trailer reel of gorgeous-looking upcoming titles followed.

The other games showcased at the conference are detailed in this month's preview pages, but they all looked significantly better than the Xbox 360 titles currently on sale – whether or not that's all CG



lies, though, remains to be seen. EA's Larry Probst did a lot to allay fears later on in the conference, showcasing an incredible tech demo based on *Tiger Woods PGA Tour '07*. On screen, a lifelike Tiger Woods smiled, laughed and cursed as Probst pressed buttons on the controller – all in detailed real-time. If this is what PS3 will be able to do, we've no doubt that it'll be the superlative platform in terms of technology; nothing we've seen from Xbox 360 or the comparatively weak-specced Wii compares to how visually and technically impressive EA's demo was.

Sony also detailed plans for its online play and digital distribution services, both of which will be free of charge unlike Xbox Live (though we're yet to hear what the publishers themselves will charge for content on the PS3 online service). Downloading songs from a *SingStar* catalogue, buying extra content for games, text messaging and video chat were all displayed although the prices seemed to be placeholders. It will have to be quite impressive to compete with the revamped Xbox Live, but Hirai is confident that PlayStation3's online functions will be as integral to the console as Live is to the 360.

The conference finished with a *WarHawk* demo showing off the capabilities of the new tilt controller, and though the message was encouraging, concerns have arisen in E3's aftermath. Sony's removal of rumble functionality from its pads has been seen as an unwise move, and following the failure of the Xbox 360 Core pack the release of two versions of the system could be seen as misguided. There's also the fact that even the 20GB version is prohibitively expensive costing at least £350 – with games coming in at up to £70. The coast is far from clear for Sony just now, and there are still a number of obstacles to be overcome before November's launch – if Sony is to catch up with Microsoft, there's a lot of work to do.

NOT ANOTHER...

CONSOLE MANUFACTURER CATFIGHT

Mr Moore. It takes a special kind of man to get a tattoo just for a press conference.

MY DAD COULD BEAT UP YOUR DAD

As you may have noticed, **games™**'s production schedule means that our E3 issue is appearing on the shelves a little later than most – and pretty much the only advantage of that is that we get to work in a little bit of reportage on the aftermath of the show. Predictably enough, now that the dust has settled after the stampede of E3 announcements and everyone has started picking holes in company strategies, the worst culprits are the companies themselves.

Step up Microsoft's charismatic Peter Moore, first to the bitching podium, who doesn't much like the new PlayStation3 controller. "I don't think it's a huge issue. I'm less worried that somehow people are going to ignore a 10 million unit headstart because they want to do a game with motion control," he stated to games™ in an interview during the show, whilst also taking the time to rubbish the price: "We were somewhat surprised that the price was actually announced. When I remember the furore we got for 299 and 399 Euros, I can only imagine what's going on back home for 599 Euros for what looks to me like a platform that's on a par at best with some of the software we're showing."

Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto had something to say about Sony's new controller too, although he was characteristically sweet about it. "The fact that they looked at what we were doing and decided it was a good path is kind of flattering; it reinforces in our minds that we're doing the right thing," he said in Californian publication the *Edmonton Sun*. "What they've done is just take your standard controller and add in this motion-sensing device that's similar to what we did back on the Game Boy Color many years ago." He wasn't very impressed with Microsoft's showing, though: "They're talking about the next generation of the same old videogames – it's the same old experiences with new graphics." We needn't even be here, really – they're pointing out all the failings of the systems themselves.

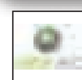
LAUNCH MATTERS

PlayStation3 will hit Japan on 11 November 2006 and Europe and America on the 17 November with a launch price of a disturbing $599. There was also the surprise announcement at the conference of a slightly lower-spec PS3 model with a 20GB hard drive next to the standard model's 60GB version, which will apparently retail at $100 less – but since the conference, confusion has reigned over whether this slightly more affordable model will reach the UK. GameStation says it won't be available at this point in time, whereas Game seems to be under the impression that it will – either way, the machine runs the risk of appearing far too expensive at a UK retail price of £425.

DATA STREAM

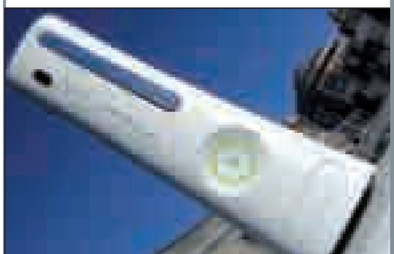
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HACKED OFF

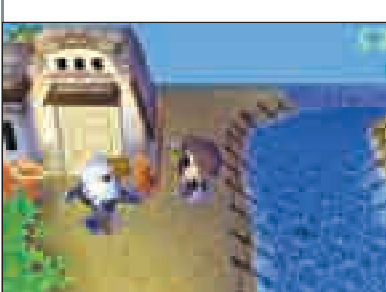
Microsoft has warned 360 owners to leave their Xboxes alone as hackers can modify the console so that it plays pirate software. A spokesman stated that modified consoles, "will not be eligible for technical support, and the user's warranty will be voided". The abundance of illegal copying in all media suggests it's unlikely that these words will be much of a deterrent, but Microsoft is committed to finding new ways of keeping 360 secure, and has promised that it, "will respond appropriately as unauthorised activity is identified".

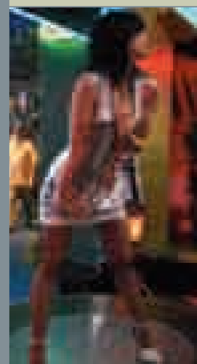




WILD SUCCESS

As the PSP slinks into the corner amid a barrage of cutting remarks on UMD sales and dodgy D-pads, the DS is given yet another reason to jump for joy. Sales of *Animal Crossing: Wild World* have topped 3 million worldwide, taking its place alongside *Mario Kart DS* and *Nintendogs* as a multi-million seller for the handheld. The game's so popular in Japan that an animated film is scheduled for release this December. Next up in Nintendo's march toward palm-top domination is *Brain Age* which sold 2 million copies in just under a year in Japan.





$5,000 is a mere drop in the ocean for multi-million-dollar game companies.



BOOTH BABES BACK AGAIN

ESA CRACKDOWN PROVES INEFFECTUAL

At the beginning of the year, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) announced some shocking news for anyone heading to Los Angeles for its yearly gaming expo, E3. This year, it claimed, would be the first E3 without booth babes – well, in their previous, basically naked state at least. The anguished cries of lonely journos could be heard from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Booth babes have become almost as synonymous with the E3 experience as the games themselves, and their scandalously small outfits had always been in direct contravention of the ESA's dress code. Rather than being a bold new initiative, this was simply the ESA finally enforcing its own rules. "The E3 dress-code rules remain identical to what they have been for several years," claimed Doug Lowenstein, ESA president, " What's new in 2006 is an update and strengthening of the show's enforcement policies for these rules."

The relatively young age of game companies' target audience, and their flagrant use of sex to sell their products has long been a sore point for many. However,



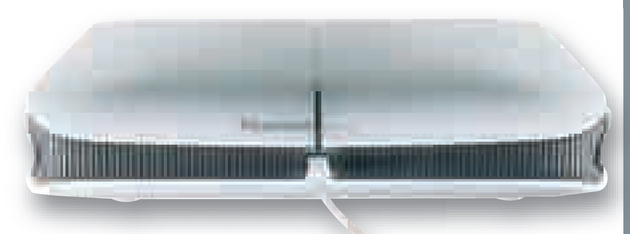
"BOOTH BABES ARE A LOT MORE COST EFFECTIVE"

despite the promise of less skin, very little seems to have changed. Slim, attractive models still litter the show floor, dressed in crop-tops and mini-skirts rather than bikinis, but still very much more naked than dressed. A fact corroborated by the number of men queuing for a picture.

The proposed fine for any company not adhering to the rules was $5,000, a mere trifle for companies that spend six-figure sums on promotions for the event, and a poor deterrent against what remains a sound marketing strategy. In an interview with Game Spot UK, Susan Corben vice president of marketing at Nyko commented, "[booth babes] are a lot more cost effective, and I think publishers recognise that. Your return on investment is infinitely greater".

Many still sneer at the ESA for their nanny-ish outlook, but isn't it high time that the games industry faced up to its own antiquated, patriarchal nature? Even supposedly feminist gaming icons like Lara Croft are highly sexualised objects – tiny waists, pneumatic breasts, pouting lips – and are far more telling of the desires of their male creators than actual female aspirations. If the industry is to broaden its appeal beyond an audience of young males, subtly misogynistic relics like the booth babes will have to be the first to go.


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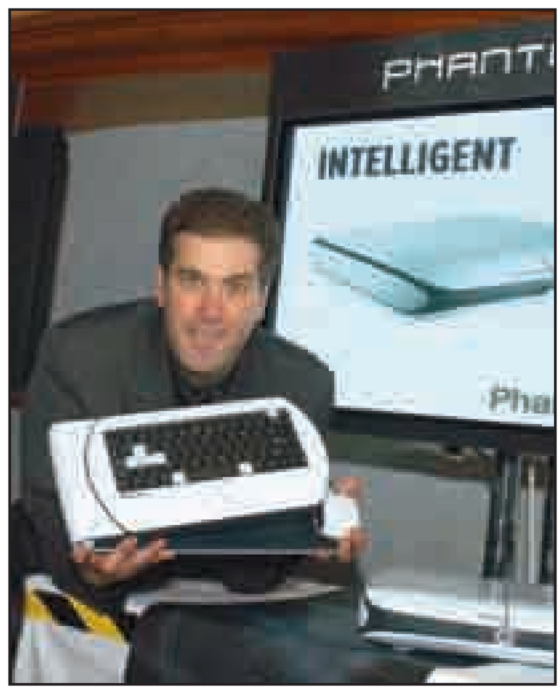
PHANTOM PROFITS

TIM ROBERTS GETS CREATIVE

"The SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] has concluded that Tim Roberts has done something wrong. We don't know what it was. I don't know if Tim even knows what it was," said Kevin Bachus who replaced Roberts as CEO of Infinium Labs. The company is famous for its much-mooted Phantom console which has failed to materialise despite it being years since it was first announced. Now Roberts has given them a whole new problem to worry about.

The trouble started when Roberts hired stock promoter Michael Pickens to send faxes to thousands of investors claiming that the Phantom would enjoy a successful launch in 2005. Stock prices rose considerably, and Roberts is accused of then selling 1.3 million shares of his own stock at the new price. It'd be great business were it not for one small fact – it was all a lie.

The SEC is requesting that Roberts repay all the profits accrued by the scam and be forbidden from buying stock or acting as the director of any company in the future. The actual release of the Phantom, as ever, remains a mystery.



The 'phantom' console that will probably just remain one of life's little mysteries…

games™ THE TOP FIVE

THINGS WE SAW AT E3



No.5 THE OLSEN TWINS

Careful, they snap easily.



No.4 NO MEXICAN FOOD

It's all the same, but folded differently.



No.3 A ROOM WITH A VIEW

A lot smaller than we thought.



No.2 JOHNNY ROCKETS

Ropey as hell, but great for hangovers.



No.1 ULTIMATE MARGARITAS

Beautiful. Potent. Deadly.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 45: LOS ANGELES



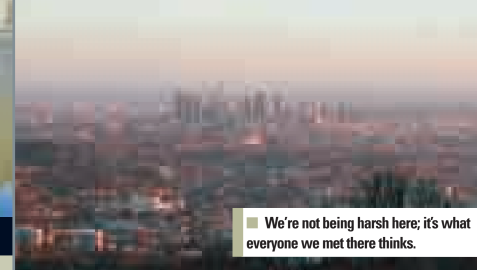
Everything comes with a hefty sprinkling of syrup.

We understand that it's risky territory, but this is not just another jingoistic anti-America diatribe. We've met enough people from the US of A to know that a significant portion of Americans agree with our point – Los Angeles sucks.

We love games, and it follows that we also love E3, but couldn't they hold it anywhere else? San Francisco? New York? The Rio slums?

It takes about three hours to get sick of the endless stream of "dudes" flung in your direction, which only seem to stop so your waitress can mock British cuisine before pushing another plate of sweaty, over-cooked eggs and shrivelled, bullet-hard bacon in your face, before pouring syrup over the lot and leaving a confusing wedge of orange on the side.

The sweltering, smog-drenched fug that blankets this sprawling, haphazard metropolis does little to enliven the endless stream of identikit low-rise buildings; only the wealthier areas can lay claim to anything like individuality, but they only serve to highlight how run-down everything else looks. If there's another city in the world whose residents so openly detest it, we'd like to see it. Or rather, we wouldn't. Have a nice day.



We're not being harsh here; it's what everyone we met there thinks.


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DATA STREAM

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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SONIC HERO

Legendary Sonic creator Yuji Naka is leaving his role as creative officer for research and development at Sega to become CEO of new company Prope Ltd. Naka said, " We named our company Prope in the hopes of bringing game entertainment much closer to users… 'Prope' is a Latin preposition that means 'nearby'" Naka is moving under the terms of Sega's Game Creator Independence Program, which will give Naka greater control but leave Sega with a ten per cent stake in the company and global publishing rights to all its future titles.

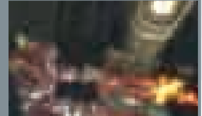




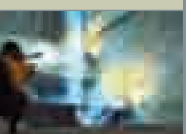
360 LOSSES

Microsoft has posted third quarter losses of $388 million for its Home Entertainment division. While the section includes PC games and interactive television products, the majority of the loss is attributable to Xbox 360. Microsoft VP Peter Moore remains confident: "Our business model anticipates that while we currently sell Xbox 360 consoles at a negative margin, product cost reductions and the future margins on sales of games and other products will enable us to achieve a positive margin over the Xbox 360 lifecycle".

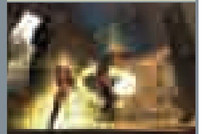




The strength of the MMO proves there's a huge base of PC gamers out there.



Is Microsoft neglecting its PC customers over console gamers?



Microsoft's talked-about upcoming Vista operating system may return focus to the home computer.

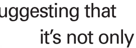


DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND

PC NEEDS STRONGER PRESENCE IN ORDER TO PROGRESS

This year's E3 was awash with exciting console announcements, but aside from Microsoft pimping Vista at its conference, the PC platform received very little attention. Indeed, with all the focus on next-generation consoles the PC is in danger of getting left out as Microsoft continues to focus on Xbox and its games. Indeed, *Age Of Empires* creator Brian Sullivan, among others, has spoken out about his concerns that the PC has no real support left.

"As a PC gamer, I really wish [Microsoft] had stuck with PC gaming, because PC gaming doesn't really have a champion," commented Sullivan in a recent interview. "With all the consoles, the manufacturer's the big champion, but PC gaming finds no champion in Microsoft and their own Xbox," he said. Of course, publishers appear to be adopting more and more of a console focus as the next generation approaches, leaving the PC without many exclusive prospects. *F.E.A.R.*, *Oblivion* and the upcoming *Shadowrun* are all being released on Xbox 360 as well, suggesting that it's not only Microsoft shifting focus. The fact that PC and Xbox players will be able to play together through Live Anywhere might be promising, but it could also be seen as an amalgamation between console and PC gaming – an amalgamation that PC gamers don't want.



"WITH THE FOCUS ON NEXT-GEN CONSOLES THE PC IS IN DANGER OF GETTING LEFT OUT"

The strength of MMO titles is testament to the fact that the PC audience is still alive and kicking – *World Of Warcraft's* subscriber base continues to grow at an alarming rate – and whoever champions the PC will have a very willing consumer base to back it up. THQ has shown commitment by investing in *Titan Quest*, but aside from the *Half-Life 2* content under development at Valve, the PC lacks other exclusive big-name titles on the horizon. Now that Lionhead is a part of Microsoft Game Studios, its focus will probably shift toward Xbox 360 as well, leaving Microsoft in danger of neglecting the audience that got it to where it is today.

Time was that the PC was firmly at the forefront of new developments in gaming, and consoles were something of a soft option. This may now be on the brink of changing. Unless someone steps up to champion the PC as the lucrative, viable and pioneering platform that it is, the PC-exclusive gaming audience could begin to notice signs of neglect before long.

NO HANDS

EXEC DISMISSES RUMOURS THAT MICROSOFT IS WORKING ON HANDHELD

The head of Xbox for northern and eastern Europe, Neil Thompson, has quashed rumours that Microsoft is working on a handheld device, stating instead that the firm is interested in the mobile gaming market. In his new book *The Xbox 360 Uncloaked,* author Dean Takahashi claimed that half of the Xbox 360 hardware team were hard at work on a portable device to compete with the PSP. He said that the machine was due for release halfway through Xbox 360's lifespan.

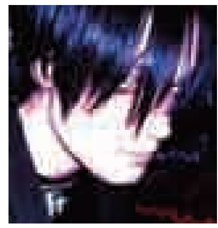
In an interview with gadget website T3, Thompson confirmed Microsoft's status, announcing that, "we're not even thinking about that at the moment. Handhelds? In the way you would think about a handheld like a PSP? No." He then went on to discuss the firm's future in mobile gaming, calling that particular market, "a really good opportunity to capitalise on the hundreds of millions of handsets that are already out there, and give people a chance to connect with other entertainment experiences".

So anyone hankering after an 'Xpod' or 'Xboy' will have to go on waiting (or make their own like we did), as Microsoft seems to be very focused on 360, Windows Vista and Live Anywhere. The old adage of not putting all your eggs in one basket seems entirely appropriate.

> "ANYONE **HANKERING** AFTER AN **'XPOD' OR 'XBOY'** WILL HAVE TO **GO ON WAITING** AS MICROSOFT IS **INTERESTED IN MOBILE GAMING"**



We saw the Xbox looking something like this. No expense spared, we tells ya.

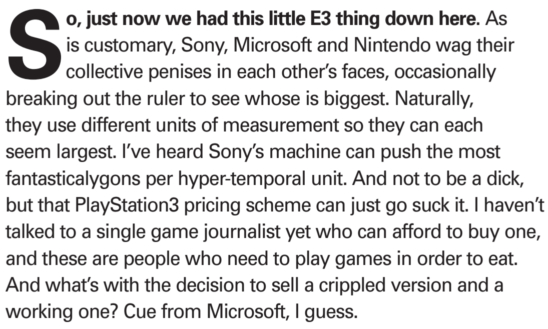


LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD


"IT'S ABOUT FAT MEN TAKING PICTURES OF ELECTRONIC THINGS FINGERS ARE TOO BLOATED TO PRESS THE BUTTONS. I CAN SEE FAT


PS3: a price that makes the 360 look like a very reasonable deal…



So, just now we had this little E3 thing down here. As is customary, Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo wag their collective penises in each other's faces, occasionally breaking out the ruler to see whose is biggest. Naturally, they use different units of measurement so they can each seem largest. I've heard Sony's machine can push the most fantasticalygons per hyper-temporal unit. And not to be a dick, but that PlayStation3 pricing scheme can just go suck it. I haven't talked to a single game journalist yet who can afford to buy one, and these are people who need to play games in order to eat. And what's with the decision to sell a crippled version and a working one? Cue from Microsoft, I guess.

Shockingly to me, the PS3 price actually made the Xbox 360 appear much more attractive. I already know what I think of Wii which is going for a different market – one that may or may not include me. We'll see about that. In terms of traditional videogame-like games, though, it's Sony versus Microsoft, and it seems 360 can almost keep up with the curve graphically – and in the near future will have some of the better games out there. *Dead Rising*, *Gears Of War* and *Lost Planet* are all begging to be played, frankly, and I don't see anything like that in the PS3 line-up just yet. And the 360 sure is cheaper.

I talked to a number of developers on the show floor about the price of PS3, and across the board people were shaking their heads. There are only a few companies that can even afford to make games for either of those consoles at this stage, so it's a good thing Nintendo came along with its $2,000 development kits and non-HD stance. Otherwise I think a number of smaller developers would be toast. And you guys in the UK have how many developers left? Five? Six? I say this not out of spite, but because it's a shame to see them close. Except Gizmondo, that was probably for the best. Never mind the fact that I have an almost complete Gizmondo collection sitting in my desk.

So anyway, what enjoyment is there in a Sony bitchfest? It's no real fun; it's too easy. Besides, it's only a matter of time, exclusive titles, and price drops before we all cave and sell our kids (or future kids) for one. So I'll leave that alone for now. E3's not about games anyway, it's about fat men trying to take pictures of electronic things, and girl things, but not quite being able because their fingers are too bloated to properly depress the buttons. Ironic how they can muster all other sorts of depression, wouldn't you say? But again, I can see fat men anywhere and quite often I do, without even asking for it!

More exciting for me was the drive back. It's 400 miles of straight freeway from Los Angeles – where E3 is held – to San Francisco – where I live and work – and just 90 miles into my journey I stopped in a small town. I stop there every trip out of a sense of tradition. Just past the truck stop, essentially the town's epicentre, I saw a hand-made sign that read, "Boys And Girls Club Yard Sale: 2,000 feet. Name your price." Name your price?



BUT NOT BEING ABLE BECAUSE THEIR MEN ANYWHERE, AND OFTEN DO"

That's not a deal easily beaten. I spent some two hours scouring boxes for hidden treasure.

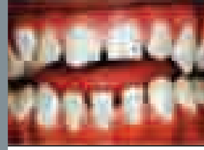
I stuffed a suitcase full of ancient clothes to take back and sell, and grabbed a couple of books on witchcraft, and a tacky laminated foil map of North America pasted to a flat slab of wood. The real gem, though, was something I picked up simply because it said "Le Book" on the front. Turns out it was a personal diary from 1981. The diary of a travelling Christian musician who often prayed, had difficulties with women, and ate at some place called the Ground Round. Sometimes he'd go shopping for shoes. We even learned his favourite game. Here's a choice entry: Monday March 16 1981. It started snowing and the wind was blowing. They were rebuilding the airport, and it was cold. We switched planes in St Louis. During the layover, I ate a Rocky Road bar and played *Asteroids*. We landed at 1:56, and Scudder picked me up. We went to a new Mexican restaurant and then looked at turntables and cassette decks. Then we had dessert at Chez Natural. No Heidi. Afterward, we went to JT Studios and gave them jackets. We played a bit at my place and didn't get anywhere.

The man's a natural new game journalist. He even chronicles his high-score progress. It's very odd looking into someone's grown life, taking place during the year I was born. I'd better not tell you his name, but he's currently on tour, as I understand, with the Electric Prunes, and is now my hero for life.

Many thanks
Brandon

MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Girls that are too self conscious about gross teeth to say no.



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

People with straight teeth.



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

GIRLS AND GAMES



The rumours are true, girls play these things! A cute female stranger on the train sat down next to me with a DS, and we played *New Super Mario Bros* together till she got off at her stop. It was like something out of a goddamn movie. And now I know where she works.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	PS2
2	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	Xbox
3	Over The Hedge	Activision	PS2
4	Kingdom Hearts II	Square Enix	PS2
5	Over The Hedge	Activision	GC
6	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	360
7	Major League Baseball 2K6	2K Sports	PS2
8	The Godfather: The Game	Electronic Arts	PS2
9	Fight Night Round 3	EA Sports	PS2
10	Black	Electronic Arts	PS2

(Updated 30/05/06)



X-Men: The Official Game

Over The Hedge





KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"THEY SCREAM FROM ATOP LADDERS THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN USED FOR IN A LIGHT BULB, JUST TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE THAT MAKES PEOPLE

You know how much the PlayStation3 is going to cost by now, yes? Think about it one more time. Get that number in your head. Got it? Okay, that's good. Now, I present the number that's in my head: "¥???". Yes, that's a Japanese Yen sign and three question marks. The version of the hardware with the 20GB hard drive will cost ¥59,800. The version with the 60GB hard drive, also known as "the version anyone in their right mind would want," is currently listed at "Open price".

Ever heard those rumours that people in Asia haggle over the prices of goods? To you, this might recall the image of guys in exotic clothes, maybe with scimitars in their belts, speaking quickly and rubbing their fingers together. To me it recalls men standing on ladders in a department store, screaming into a megaphone beneath harsh fluorescent lights.

That's the situation in Tokyo electronic stores: they stand on ladders screaming blue murder. It's hard to make out what they're saying. A lot is written about how superficial the Japanese are. Well, here's another superficiality. They scream in stores, from atop metal ladders that have never been used for the purpose of screwing in a light bulb, just to create an atmosphere that makes people think 'Yes, I am shopping. Yes I am'.

An open price is a price the manufacturer refuses to set. Obviously they set the bulk price by which the outlets purchase the units. It's up to the store to set the price on the actual unit. This means you go to the store to buy this thing and you get caught up in mathematical nonsense. You get accosted by ((sometimes) several (usually old)) men who can't speak a full sentence without including a set of triple-nested parentheses.

I've seen the *FFXIII* and *MGS4* trailers, so I'll have a PS3. I have to have one whether I want it or not. However, I'll feel weird about buying one because the guy at the store will be forced by Japan's chief custom ('Follow the rules.') to talk me up for an hour. How this will affect the usual photos of guys standing in long lines outside game stores on launch day, I don't know. Maybe they'll do the up-talking in advance. Maybe you'll have to put all your money down at the pre-order phase. I should get on this already.

In preparation to buy my 60GB HDMI-ready PS3, I bought a Sony Bravia KDL-40X-1000 LCD HDTV. It too was an open price. It is 40 inches wide and super-awesome. However, buying it confused me. How much did it cost me? I can't really remember. The Bic Camera store I bought it at had it listed as ¥448,000, though there was a sticker over that saying "We'll make it cheaper". They made it ¥400,000 and gave me 120,000 in 'points' on my 'point card'. The point card can be used repeatedly just like cash, so it was ¥280,000 generally. I wonder about the maths of the points stored on my card.



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 45:

OPENING A TREASURE BOX

Takarabako wo aketa!!	You opened the treasure chest!!
…Takarabako wa karappo datta.	…The treasure box was empty.
…Takarabako no nakami wa… yakusou deshita.	…Inside the treasure box was… a medical herb.
…Birii wa yakusou wo te ni ireta.	…Billy took the herb.
…Takarabako ha mimikku deshita!!	…The treasure box was a Mimic!!
…Kimochi waruku natteshimatta.	…You came to feel very strange. [From *Mother 3*]

THE PURPOSE OF SCREWING THINK 'YES, I AM SHOPPING'"

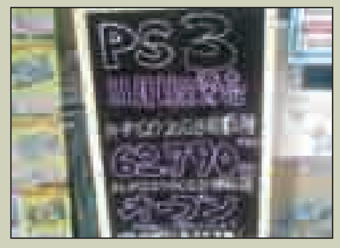
I can only use those points to buy things at Bic Camera, of course, so I guess I have a year's free shopping there.

Normally when buying something at Bic Camera, they put points on your card based on what you buy. Normally you get about 10%. I haggled the guy up to 30% when I bought my HDTV, though I wonder if I was bargaining or if he was letting me think I was? Then I had a few weird existential moments. It was like *MGS2* for a few minutes.

So when PS3 is upon us, I'll be looking at signs outside electronics stores, that say "Get a point bonus with your pre-order". They used to give you posters; now it's all money. Buy something; get money. Everyone wins money. If buying videogames in this country becomes any more like playing some dreary RPG with a very slow combat system, I'm going to… well, I'm going to stop playing RPGs. And then, I guess I won't need videogames anymore. I'm so confused.

Kind regards





YOU STILL CAN'T BUY A DS IN JAPAN

It. Has. Been. Six. Months. Since you could buy a DS in Japan. And yet every week sales reports show that a million-odd pieces of software have been sold. How? Well, Nintendo is selling games to people who already own the system. I can't think of a better person to sell to, myself. Everything on other systems looks like it's targeted at the type of person who buys a console for one particular game, and then sells the game and the console once they're done with the game. They do that a lot over here, and the perfect condition of used game shops proves it. DS software has everyone enjoying everything.

When I bought my HDTV, I thought 'I should use some of these 120,000 points to buy a DS Lite'. Of course, I was unable to do that because the things have been sold out since they've been on sale. It strikes me again that the initial batch of consoles is just a crafty bit of pre-release PR. I'll hold onto my old DS.

Still, six months and no DSes? Two months after launch and still no Lites widely available? At first it was something for Nintendo to be proud of – a smash cultural phenomenon. Now it's just starting to look amateurish.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	.Hack//GU Vol 1: Saitan	Bandai	PS2
2	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
3	Tetris DS	Nintendo	DS
4	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
5	World Soccer Winning Eleven 10	Konami	PS2
6	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
7	Powerful Pro Major League Baseball	Konami	PS2
8	English Training	Nintendo	DS
9	Pokémon: Road To Diamond & Pearl	Nintendo	DS
10	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	DS

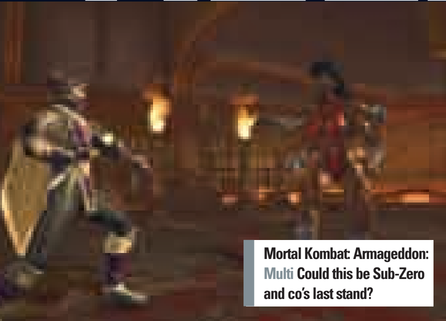
(Updated week ending 21/05/06)



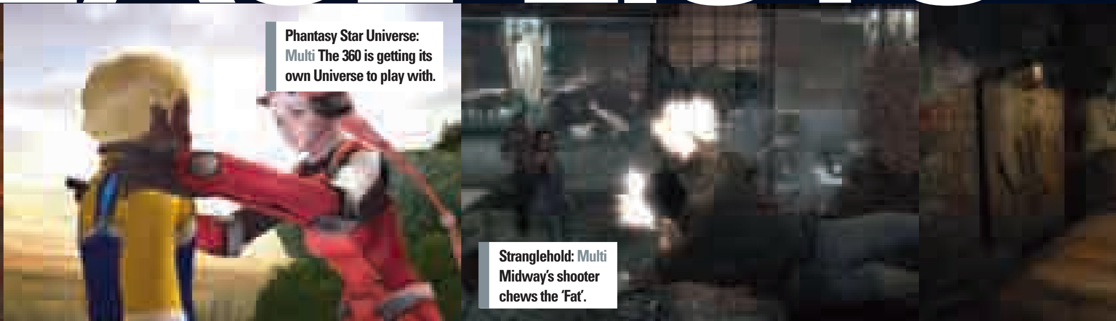
Animal Crossing: Wild World

Mario Kart DS

RELEASE LISTS



Mortal Kombat: Armageddon: Multi Could this be Sub-Zero and co's last stand?



Phantasy Star Universe: Multi The 360 is getting its own Universe to play with.

Stranglehold: Multi Midway's shooter chews the 'Fat'.

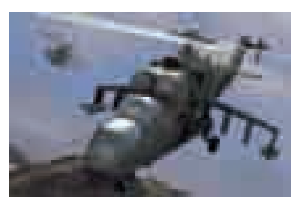


games™ MOST PLAYED

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Electronic Arts

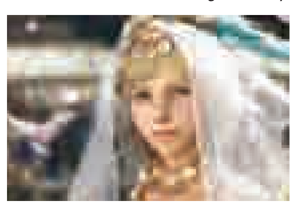
Those hours put into the original Xbox version of EA's online shooter have paid off. Already, the **games™** elite soldiers have scaled *Modern Combat's* ranks and, despite an unfortunate incident involving a misplaced airstrike, are serious Live contenders. Special Ops never die.



FINAL FANTASY XII

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Square Enix

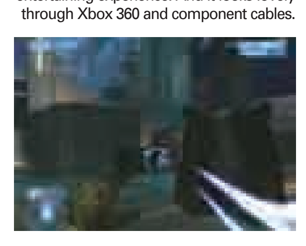
Now *Oblivion* is *almost* out of our system, along comes another life-sapping RPG to consume every hour of our mortal lives. The weather's improving, Bournemouth's delectable female population is out in force, and we need to stop playing RPGs for fear of losing our sanity.



HALO 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

Anyone brave enough to wade back into *Halo 2's* overcrowded online arena may have been pleasantly surprised. A large part of the hideous American teen community has since migrated, leaving a much more pleasant, fairer and altogether entertaining experience. And it looks lovely through Xbox 360 and component cables.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '06			
23 June	World Championship Poker 2	Crave	
30 June	Shin Megami Tensei: DDS	Ghostlight	
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters	
JULY '06			
07 July	Dance Factory	Codemasters	
14 July	Cars	THQ	
21 July	Jaws	THQ	
28 July	WWII: Air Supremacy	Midas	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
TBC	Metal Slug 3D	SNK	
Q2 '06			
TBC	And1 Streetball	Ubisoft	
TBC	Aquanox: The Angel's Tears	JoWood	
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	Koei	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Yakuza	Sega	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Buzz!: The Movie Quiz	Sony	
TBC	Crimson Tears	Capcom	
TBC	D1rT	Koch Media	
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	
TBC	Free Running	Eidos	
TBC	Forbidden Siren 2	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	SpyHunter: Nowhere To Run	Midway	
TBC	The Regiment	Konami	
TBC '07			
TBC	God Of War II	Sony	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '06			
23 June	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	Rising Star	
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
AUGUST'06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
TBC '06			
TBC	Chaos Field	03 Entertainment	
TBC	Naruto	D3 Publisher	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

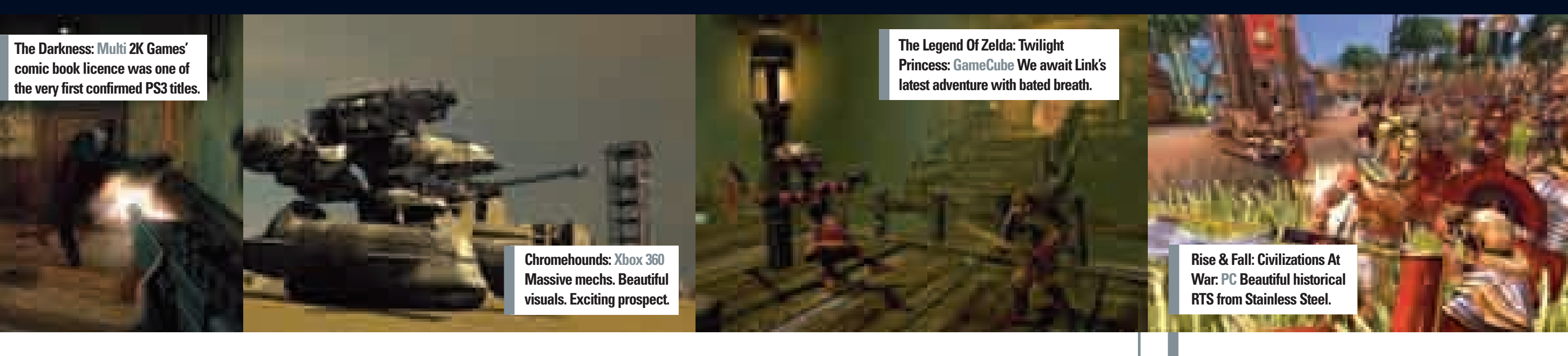
Month	Title	Publisher
JUNE '06		
23 June	FlatOut 2	Empire
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision
TBC	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega
JULY '06		
07 July	World Tour Golf	Oxygen
Q2 '06		
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight
TBC	Bully	Rockstar
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	Vivendi
TBC '06		
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
TBC	StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard



XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '06			
30 June	MotoGP '06	THQ	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Chromehounds	Sega	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Prey	2K Games	
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	
TBC '06			
TBC	AITD: Near Death Investigation	Atari	
TBC	BioShock	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft	
TBC	Crackdown	Microsoft	
TBC	DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball 2	Microsoft	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


The Darkness: Multi 2K Games' comic book licence was one of the very first confirmed PS3 titles.

Chromehounds: Xbox 360 Massive mechs. Beautiful visuals. Exciting prospect.

The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess: GameCube We await Link's latest adventure with bated breath.

Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War: PC Beautiful historical RTS from Stainless Steel.

TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	–eNCHANT arM–	Ubisoft	
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega	
TBC	Frame City Killer	Namco	
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 3	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Huxley	Webzen	
TBC	LMA Manager 2006	Codemasters	
TBC	Lost Planet	Capcom	
TBC	Ninety-Nine Nights	Microsoft	
TBC	Possessed	Namco	
TBC	Saint's Row	THQ	
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Stranglehold	Midway	
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	
TBC	The Darkness	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft	
TBC	Viva Piñata	Microsoft	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC '07			
TBC	Shadowrun	Microsoft	
TBC	Army Of Two	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Mass Effect	Microsoft	
TBC	Virtua Tennis 3	Sega	
TBC	The Club	Sega	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE/JULY '06			
28 June	Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	
TBC	WOW: The Burning Crusade	Blizzard	
Q2 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC	Prey	2K Games	
TBC '06			
TBC	Company Of Heroes	THQ	
TBC	Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Activision	
TBC	Gothic III	JoWood	
TBC	Hellgate: London	Namco	
TBC	Joint Task Force	Vivendi	
TBC	Reservoir Dogs	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Spore	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Tabula Rasa	NCsoft	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher
JUNE '06		
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision
TBC	WarioWare Twisted!	Nintendo
JULY '06		
07 July	Alex Rider: Stormbreaker	THQ
07 July	Pirates Of The Caribbean II	Buena Vista
14 July	Cars	THQ
AUGUST '06		
04 August	Monster House	THQ

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher
JUNE '06		
TBC	Def Jam Fight For NY: The Takeover	Electronic Arts
TBC	Infected	THQ
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega
JULY '06		
07 July	World Tour Golf	Oxygen
14 July	Cars	THQ
21 July	Juiced: Eliminator	THQ
21 July	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway
TBC '06		
TBC	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Vivendi
TBC	Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai	Atari
TBC	Field Commander	Ubisoft
TBC	Gangs Of London	Sony
TBC	Gran Turismo 4: Mobile	Sony
TBC	MGS: Portable Ops	Konami
TBC	NBA Ballers: Rebound	Midway
TBC	Silent Hill: Origins	Konami
TBC	Talkman	Sony

NINTENDO DS

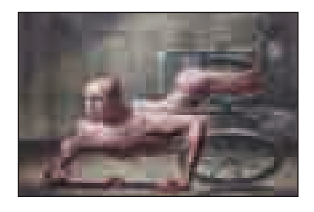
Month	Title	Publisher	
JUNE '06			
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision	
23 June	Puyo Pop Fever	Sega	
30 June	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	
TBC	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters	
JULY '06			
14 Jul	Cars	THQ	
TBC	Electroplankton	Nintendo	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
11 August	Age Of Empires	Majesco	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami	
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star	
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
TBC '06			
TBC	Guilty Gear	SNK	
TBC	Last Ninja	Play It	
TBC	Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	
TBC	Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



SILENT HILL: ORIGINS

Format: PlayStation Portable
Publisher: Konami
The next bout of Konami-fuelled terror comes not on the format we expected. With development in the capable hands of UK-based Climax, and a promise of a return to the psychological horror of number 2, this PSP *Hill* unearths the 'origins' of the town and its gruesome culture – a must for series fans.



Wii SPORTS

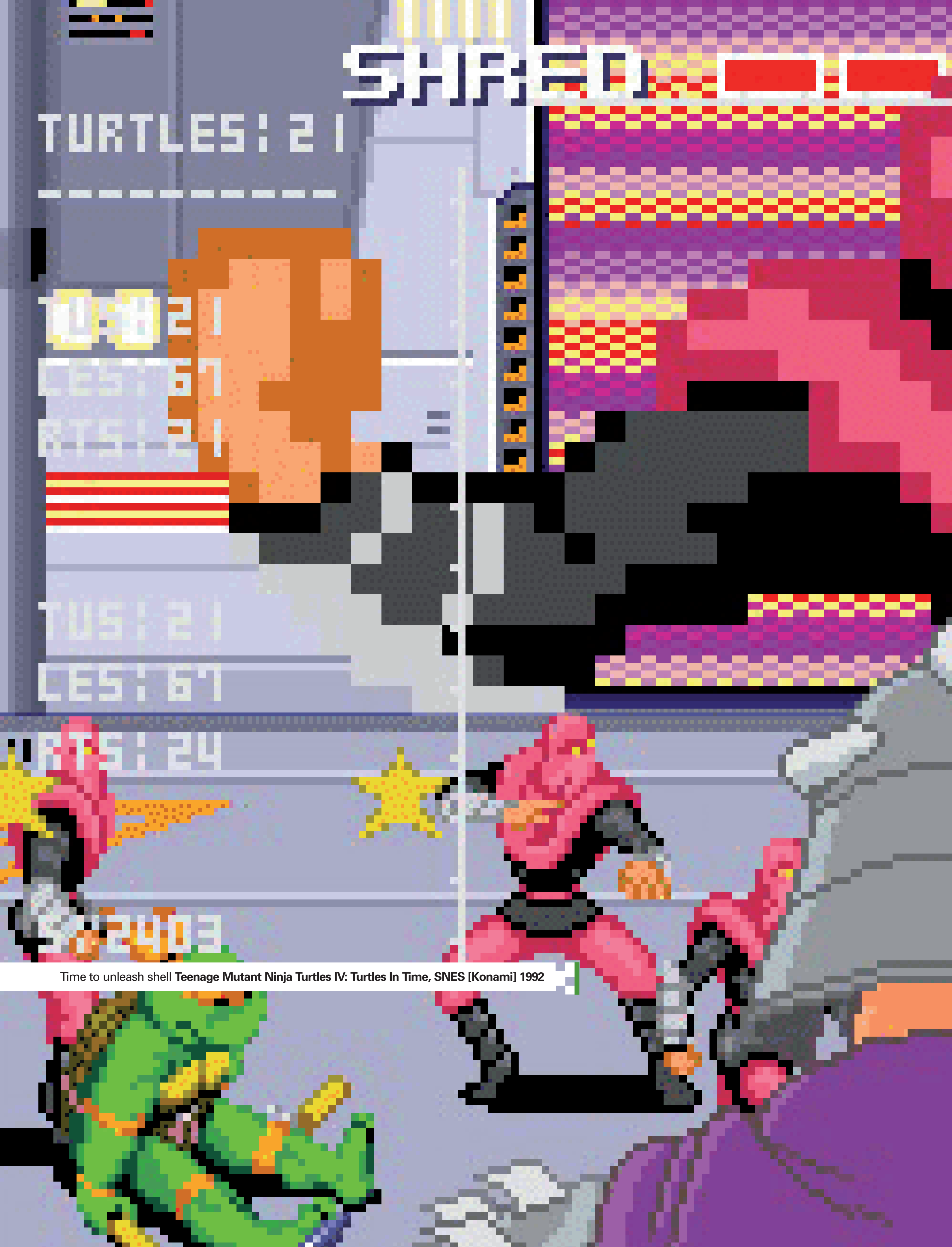
Format: Nintendo Wii
Publisher: Nintendo
The sight of Fils-Aime, Iwata and Miyamoto swinging about their Wii controllers on the stage at the Nintendo pre-E3 conference was a perfect summation of what the former Revolution is all about. Sociable innovative gaming with the focus on fun. Good stuff.



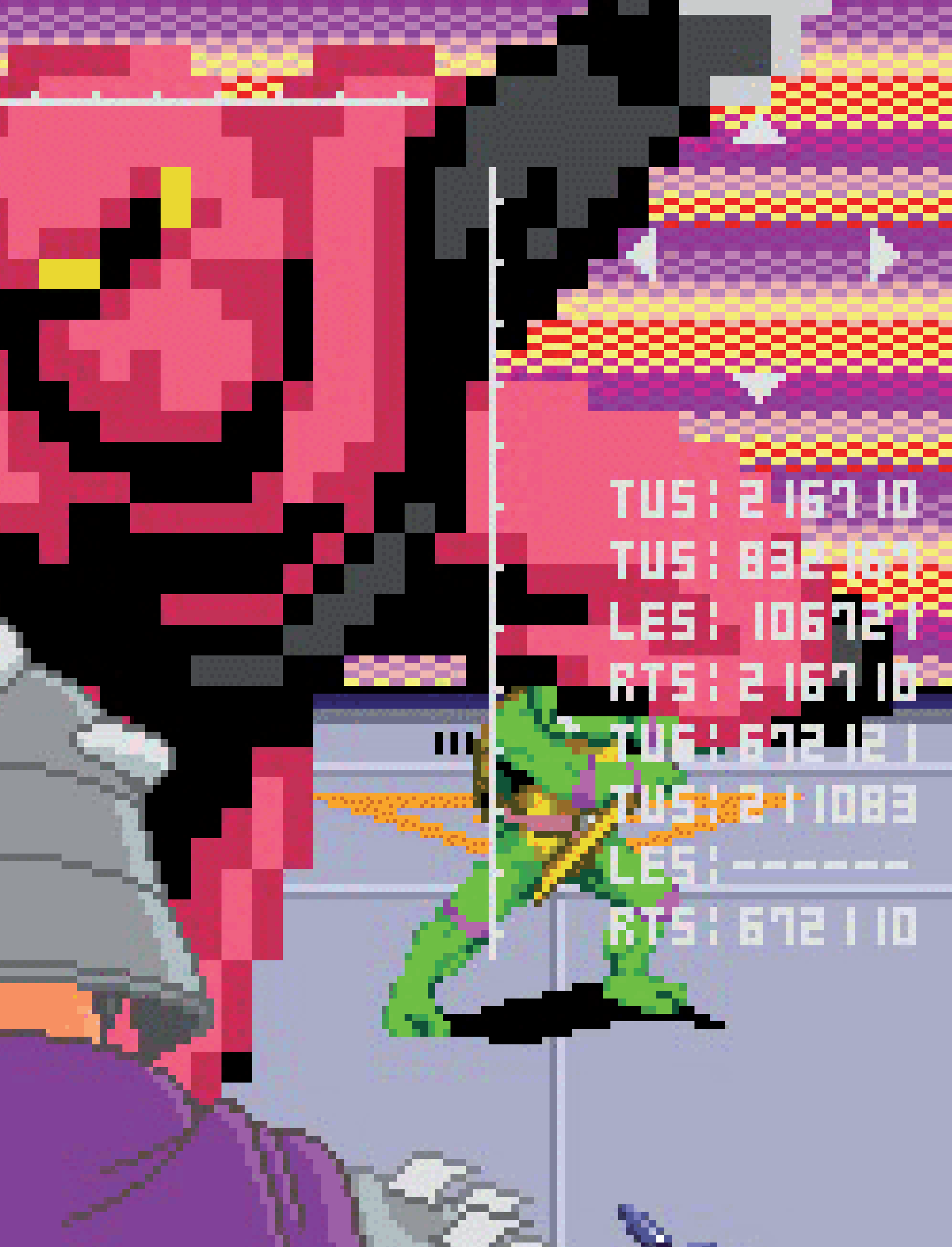
LOCOROCO

Format: PlayStation Portable
Publisher: Sony
The downloadable demo has only whetted our appetites further for this joyous mix of *Katamari* and orange jelly. It's been designed from the ground up for the PlayStation Portable and it shows. The controls, art design and clarity of the visuals are stellar. We'd just want some more now please!





Time to unleash shell **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles In Time, SNES [Konami] 1992**



TUS: 216710
LES: 106721
RTS: 216710
LES: ------
RTS: 672110

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2



"FORZA MOTORSPORT 2 BURNS RUBBER AT 60FPS WITH 4X FULL-SCREEN ANTI-ALIASING, MOTION BLUR, AND HIGH-DYNAMIC-RANGE LIGHTING IN CRISP 720P HIGH-DEFINITION GLORY"

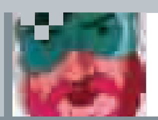
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE ROAD TO GLORY

FORZA + PGR3 x NEXT GEN = FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

■ *Forza Motorsport 2* will take the best elements from *Forza 1* and improve upon them significantly.

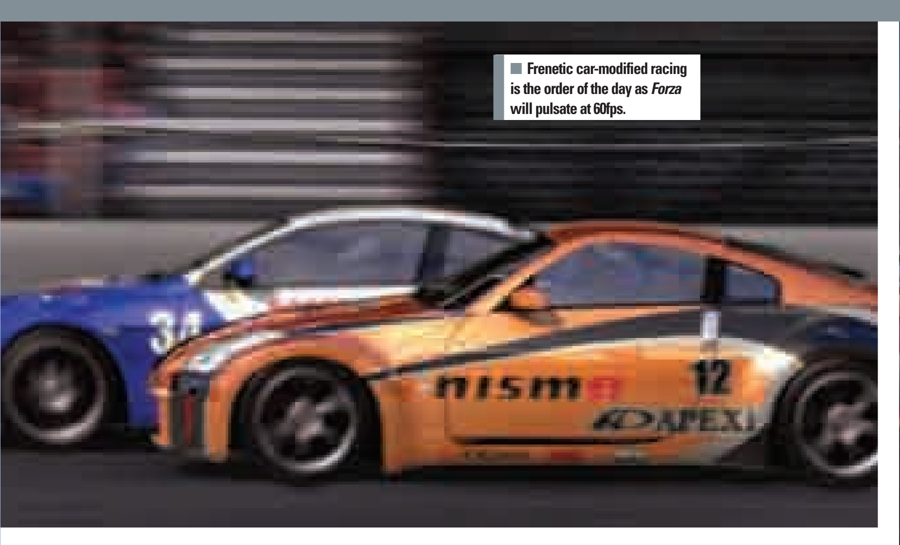


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Dan Greenawalt's introduction to the games industry came in 1997 when he joined Microsoft as a tester. He moved up the ranks to become lead game designer of Microsoft Game Studio's critically acclaimed driving simulation *Forza Motorsport*. His past projects include *Rallisport Challenge* and *Project Gotham*.

HISTORY

- **FORZA MOTORSPORT** 2005 [Xbox]
- **RALLISPORT CHALLENGE** 2002 [Xbox]
- **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING** 2002 [Xbox]



■ Frenetic car-modified racing is the order of the day as *Forza* will pulsate at 60fps.



■ Fancy lighting, speedy camera angles, car reflections and blur-effects… check.



FORZA 1 MAY HAVE BEEN LABELLED 'HARDCORE', BUT YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET…

Gran Turismo changed everything. But before we look at how *Forza 2* aims to evolve racing simulation further, we must stray back to December 1997 – when *GT* creator Kazunori Yamauchi's PlayStation conception hit Japanese stores – to understand the reasoning behind *Forza*. The Real Driving Simulator had a profound impact on the genre, not only did it tap into a then unrealised fan base, but it also enticed others with its web of modifications, track designs and sheer ferocity of competitions to work through. The force felt by *GT* was much the same as the impact *Mario* and *Street Fighter* had on their respective genres.

One person who felt the impact was Dan Greenawalt, the game director for *Forza Motorsport 2*. "I wasn't really into games or cars about ten years ago, but a friend of mine bought a PlayStation and a copy of *Gran Turismo*. I went over to his house and really got hooked. So I went out and got one for myself and played the hell out of it. I must've played hundreds of hours on that. It ignited this passion in me for cars and for games."

It's enthusiasm like this that makes us expect great things. Greenawalt is not only a gamer, but also a car mod-nut, having tweaked his modified, Imola Yellow, 2000 Audi S4 to within an inch of his wallet. He continues, "In a lot of ways, that game is the reason I work in this industry. I'm not going after *GT4* with *Forza 2*, I don't care about *GT4*, what I care about is that moment in *GT1* that changed my destiny. I want to ignite that passion in a new generation of gamers".

That very passion will be poured into the Photo mode, a popular showcase for those Kodak moments of racing and for any decal artists wishing to show off their impressive creations – the 360 platform will be heavily community focused. Greenawalt is hoping to create a car culture on Xbox Live akin to the real-life Internet equivalents he frequents.

When the trailer was shown at Microsoft's E3 Media Briefing last month, excitement levels naturally spiked at the impressive visuals displayed, and while no demo of the game was available, we're assured that not only was the trailer using in-game assets (ie both the car and track were in-game models), but also the finished product might actually surpass the graphical prowess of that trailer. Bold but attainable claims.

> "THE CAR COUNT HAS BEEN UPPED FROM EIGHT TO 12-PLAYER RACES, BOTH IN SINGLE-PLAYER AND ONLINE"

Of those models, over 300 licensed cars from over 50 of the world's leading manufacturers will be available (including Ferrari, Porsche, Lamborghini and McLaren) across 18 environments with 60 tracks. Many of the vehicles from the original *Forza* will appear, while the tracks from *Forza 1* will also return along with a selection of new tracks including the Nürburgring F1 circuit – which has so far only appeared in *PGR3* – and the Florida-set Sebring International Raceway.

Greenawalt is adamant that *Forza 2* will not simply be an upgrade with added bolts. "We're going to the next gen," he states, "so it's not like we're just going to port over our assets, make them HD and call it a game. For the most part we have to redo everything. We've had to redo all of the tracks and all of the textures. We're not just upping the resolution of old textures, we're really rebuilding things like crazy. We're going to

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Christmas '06
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2 (2-12 Online)

CONCEPT

■ Take the principles of *Forza Motorsport*, combine with the community and Live TV aspects of *PGR3*, mix with next-gen visuals, et voila!

TREADING TARMAC

Dan Greenawalt on track design… "Our tracks take about three months to make. We put individual textures taken from the tracks into the game, we didn't want to just slap down generic tarmac textures. The way we capture all of the data is a very cool process, we actually have guys with very expensive, almost military grade GPS, who walk the track four times on different lines to get very accurate readings. On top of that, every so many meters they take more readings using levels. We also get thousands of pictures, video footage, and blueprints per track. Getting the 13 miles of the Nürburgring is not easy, we had to rent the track for a week. It's expensive, but it's the only way."



■ Sadly for *Forza 2*, the limited images available at E3 don't do the game justice.

■ Oh look, another sweeping, bonnet-high, reverse shot advertising the Borja brand.

"WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS THAT MOMENT IN GT1 THAT CHANGED MY DESTINY. I WANT TO IGNITE THAT PASSION IN A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS"

DAN GREENAWALT, GAME DIRECTOR FOR FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

be a great looking Xbox 360 game and we're really pushing the hardware."

While *Forza 1* pushed the boundaries of Xbox, it was still criticised for only running at 30fps, something Greenawalt found tough to swallow, "As a physics guy, I had to take that with a little grain of salt. Frames per second is actually a visual representation, it has nothing to do with physics." With 360 providing more power, *Forza 2* will play and control at 60fps, the physics system under the hood will still run at 180fps and the reflection mapping on cars will speed along at 60fps – this won't mean much to some, but will mean everything to many, especially when you consider the car count has been upped from eight to 12-player races.

Along with visual improvements, the *Forza* team is significantly improving vehicle models and the values that define each car (see Value For Money), as they strive to achieve a near perfect sim. The Wireless Racing Wheel 360 that was announced at E3 will be launched with *Forza 2* and integrated into the game. The true force feedback wheel will simulate the torque lines of your front tyres to give you the feeling of understeer, while additional rumble will recreate rear tyre slippage.

As well as a modified Time Trial, which is being redesigned to attract more scoreboard hounds, a new classification system will be introduced to add to the rivalry. Most cars upgraded to the top of a class will have a fighting chance against one another – this couldn't be said of the original.

Further tweaks include a more punishing Simulation mode for those who like their driving a little too realistic. "From a design perspective, it's always interesting to see how people play your game," comments Greenawalt. "We had that whole risk/reward thing going on in our first game, where you could turn off assists to get more money, and we found that people were going for simulation damage," he says of the game's core integration. The three levels of damage – cosmetic, normal and simulation – sectioned the users between hardcore and causal. He continues, "I saw so many casual players going for simulation that it told me we could make the simulation setting even more punishing. It sounds bad, but by giving the player lots of options they can turn on or off, we're hoping that over time the casual gamer will slowly learn how to drive".

The old adage 'two heads are better than one' has benefited Microsoft lately, with the in-house team advancing the *Forza* brand, and Bizarre Creations pushing the *PGR* series. Microsoft's in-house studio (Turn 10) and close friend Bizarre are very familiar with one another. Greenawalt explains, "For the Photo mode and the TV mode we worked closely

"FURTHER TWEAKS ALSO INCLUDE A MORE PUNISHING SIMULATION MODE FOR THOSE WHO LIKE THEIR DRIVING A LITTLE TOO REALISTIC"

with Bizarre. I lived in Liverpool for a while and worked with them on the first *PGR*, our executive producer Garret Young also worked on the second *PGR*. So, we're really tight with the guys over there and as a result we actually share some technology. Our Forza TV was literally just taken out of *PGR* and plugged into *Forza Motorsport 2*. Bizarre doesn't mind because we keep advancing each other. There were features in *Forza 1* that went into *PGR3*; the seamless integration between career and multi-player came from *Forza 1*. Our hope is that our two teams can be greater than any one. As we keep pushing new features nothing will be able to keep up with us."

Will those words ring true come the next-gen *Gran Turismo*? Perhaps that's a touch optimistic. At least as each brand works hard to out-perform the other it'll be the fans who reap the rewards.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Dan Greenawalt on car tuning… "With other games I've worked on, every time we wanted to make a car, we'd go in and set some values – maybe around 200 – to make them feel individual. But in *Forza 2* we're talking 1,600 different values on each car. We built a maths model that actually tuned the cars based on the real-world data we collected. The program would crunch through all of that and we actually started finding design flaws in a couple of the cars. We were finding cars that would understeer on the way in and oversteer on the way out – kind of a death trap. I was a little concerned, but we went and checked out some reviews of some of the cars and found that people were saying the same thing. That was actually the Enzo that did that by the way."



The hugely popular Evo makes a welcome return, but will it finally surpass the Subaru?

Forza 2 could prove to be the present pinnacle of real driving sims… we really, really hope.

ASSASSIN'S CREED

BEAUTIFUL AND DEADLY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC 2007
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A historically sound, politically charged, graphically incredible next-generation action game based on the life of a 12th Century assassin.

PS3 **Although videogames often embrace a medieval setting, they usually throw in a few fantasy creatures, magic spells or distinctly incongruent weapons to make things that bit more exciting.** *Assassin's Creed* is set in the 12th Century (1191, to be precise), at the time of the Third Crusade in the Middle East, and being an action game you might expect it to take a few liberties with its setting.

It doesn't. The events, locations and characters are all historical figures, and the protagonist is a member of a genuine 12th Century Middle Eastern assassin clan, the Hashshashin (from which the western word 'assassin' was originally derived, in the opinion of many etymologists). These killers' weapon of choice was a concealed dagger attached to the wrist, and they made a point of keeping up their reputation by assassinating their marks in public, in front of crowds, even in mosques. And in *Assassin's Creed*, that's exactly what you'll be doing – picking out the architects of the Third Crusade and assassinating them in the midst of bustling medieval cities, then escaping through the crowds and alleyways.

"ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING TITLES AT E3, AND ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES WE'VE SEEN THAT FEELS TRULY NEXT GENERATION"

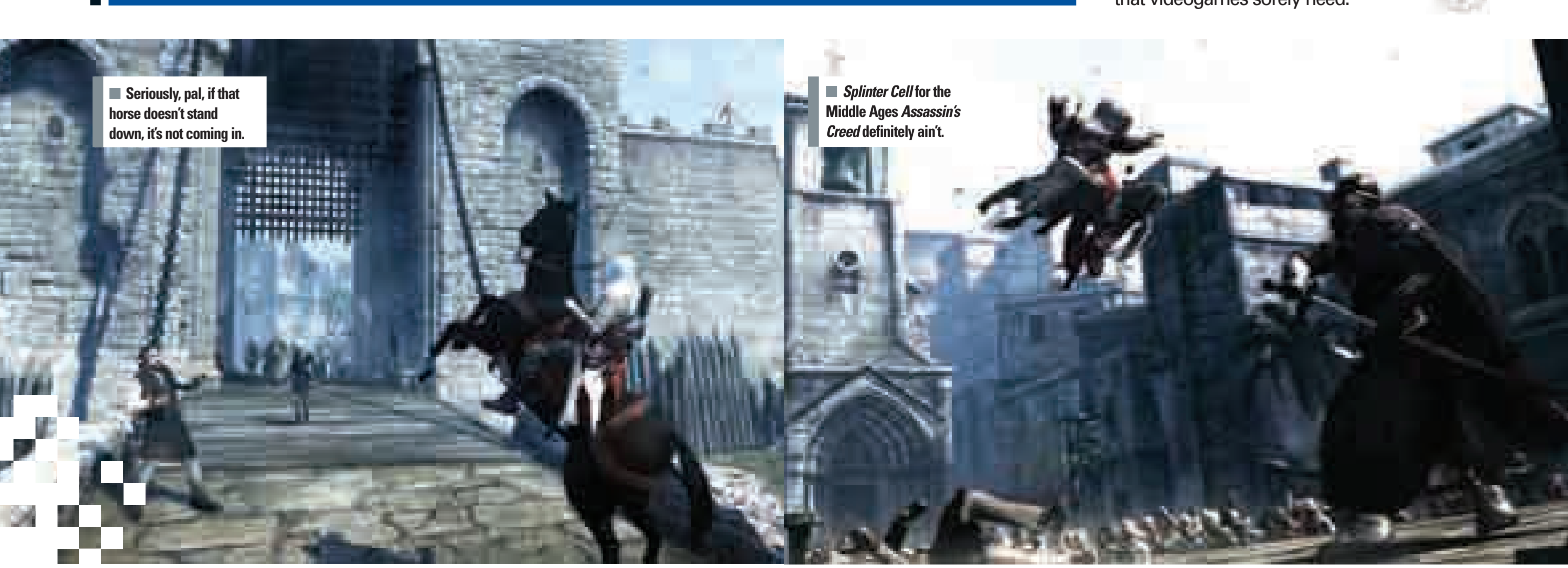
Ubisoft's mandate was to 'redefine the action-adventure genre for the next generation of consoles' – not a task to be taken lightly. Playing *Assassin's Creed*, though, you quickly realise that this is unlike anything else you've ever played. Anyone expecting a medieval *Splinter Cell* will be entirely taken aback by the protagonist Altair's freedom of movement. The animation is astonishingly fluid and Altair interacts and reacts with his surroundings in a way we've never imagined possible in a game. Working his way through crowds, he gently moves people aside, picks routes through the throng and actually steps over things on the ground; it's impossible to convey how remarkable this is until you actually see it in motion, but it looks wonderfully real.

There will, essentially, be three stages to each assassination: the premeditation, during which you gather information and form useful allies; the assassination itself which, in keeping with the Hashshashin tradition, is typically in a public place; and the escape through the crowded city. The three cities – Jerusalem, Damascus and Acre where the famous battle between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin took place in 1191 – have all been crafted with the aid of a historian, accurate to the plans of the cities from that period in history, and Altair can run through them with all the agility of the Prince of Persia. Movement has been heavily influenced by the sport of free-running, and anything that sticks out more than two inches from the scenery can be jumped upon, swung from or used for leverage as you make your escape through the panic-filled cities, back to whatever safe house you make for yourself.

Assassin's Creed was one of the most exciting games at E3, and one of the first games we've seen that feels truly next gen. We've not had the space to mention the graphics, but its stunning looks and genuinely new gameplay made it stand out a mile. Coupled with a controversial setting and uniquely mature storytelling, *Assassin's Creed* is an evolution that goes beyond the technology and delivers us a new experience with a depth and sobriety that videogames sorely need.

IT PAYS TO BE INCONSPICUOUS

Keep yourself concealed in crowds. Should you start to be more aggressive – shove someone aside or start running, for instance – you'll send visible ripples of panic through the crowd, and if you're stupid enough to attack a civilian for no reason that panic soon turns to aggression as that crowd realises it's in danger. People will crowd you, jump you, try to stop you from getting away – and if you make yourself too noticeable, it will be very difficult to escape. The freedom of movement works both ways: you'll need to build up momentum to run through a crowd, and the faster you run the more likely you are to lose your balance, as in real life.



■ Seriously, pal, if that horse doesn't stand down, it's not coming in.

■ *Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages *Assassin's Creed* definitely ain't.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Assassin's Creed is being developed by the core team behind *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time* – indeed, work on this title began shortly after *Sands Of Time* was completed. It is one of several new next-gen franchises that Ubisoft introduced at E3 and is under the care of the publisher's Montreal development studio.

HISTORY

- **KING KONG** 2005 [Multi]
- **POP: SANDS OF TIME** 2003 [Multi]
- **SPLINTER CELL** 2001 [Multi]

"ASSASSIN'S CREED IS GOING TO PUSH THE VIDEOGAME EXPERIENCE AS WE KNOW IT TODAY INTO AN ENTIRELY NEW DIRECTION"
YANNIS MALLAT, UBISOFT MONTREAL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PILLAGE LIKE IT'S 1192

THIEF 3 + THE CRUSADES – THE POPE = ASSASSIN'S CREED

Your actions leading up to a kill involve interacting with your surroundings and the general public.

GEARS OF WAR



These are the Locust and in case you haven't noticed, they are your enemies.

"THE UNREAL ENGINE 3 PUSHES HIGH-DEFINITION VISUAL DESIGNS AND BRINGS OUT THE SMALLEST DETAILS IN THE LARGEST BATTLE"
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

Just running and gunning will soon see you shot down in not such a blaze of glory.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Epic has been making games since 1991, but you'd be forgiven for thinking that its history begins and ends with the *Unreal* franchise. It certainly put the company on the map and has occupied much of its time since, and its mould-breaking Unreal engines promise great things for *Gears Of War*.

HISTORY

■ **UNREAL 2: THE AWAKENING** 2003 [Multi]
■ **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** 1999 [Multi]

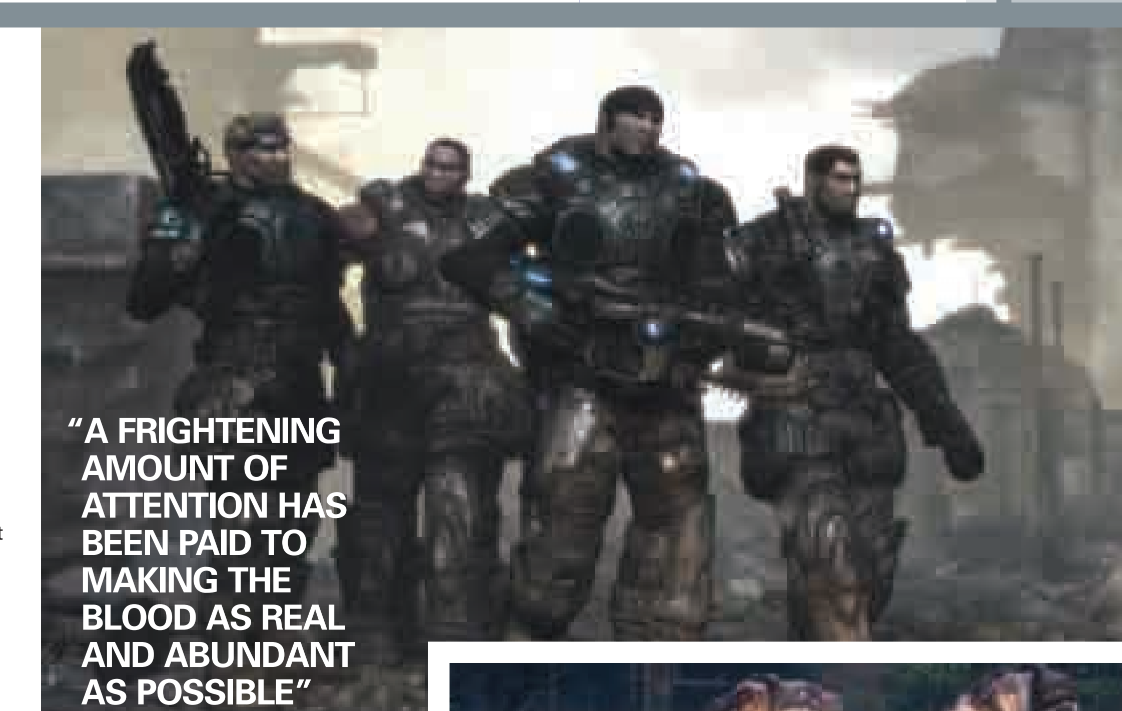


CHAINSAWS, BLOOD AND THE NEXT GENERATION

For the first time in a long while, Microsoft might really be starting to feel the pressure. The disastrous launch of Xbox 360 will likely go down in history as a prime example of how not to release a console but, in the months since, the sole representative of the next generation has taken pride of place beneath our TVs. However, the organised chaos of E3, with its abundance of Wii and PlayStation3-related delights, has woken us once more to the fact that this is no one-horse race.

Peter Moore may seem nonchalant about the imminent arrival of Microsoft's two biggest competitors, but deep down he must wish for just six more months without them. With *Halo 3* still a long way off, Microsoft needs some substantial releases by the end of the year to keep customers away from Nintendo and Sony, and it is pinning much of its hope on *Gears Of War*.

Epic's epic has been making waves for a year now, but at E3 we were finally given the chance to both see and play the game. You control Marcus Phoenix, a human soldier, in the fight against the Locust hordes, a race of murderous subterranean beings. The war has decimated the human race, leaving Earth in tatters and setting the stage for a heroic last stand. The plot may not win any awards for originality, but then *Gears Of War* seldom aims for the brain – its targets are the heart, stomach and, most obviously, the eyes. Indeed, visuals are *Gears Of War*'s most prominent strength, with graphics equal to anything exhibited for PlayStation3.



"A FRIGHTENING AMOUNT OF ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO MAKING THE BLOOD AS REAL AND ABUNDANT AS POSSIBLE"

The level we saw had Marcus battling through a gloriously grimy maze of columns and rocks, which, it becomes clear, are vital to your progress through the level. The combat is hectic, but running and gunning will see you dead very quickly. The context-sensitive A button becomes your greatest ally, allowing you to duck, roll and move between cover simply and effectively. The camera is somewhere between first and third-person – locked tight to your shoulder as in *Ghost Recon* – shaking as you move, and with every explosion. The constant judder seems jarring at first and makes aiming while moving near impossible, but it also gives proceedings an air of authenticity that most action titles lack.

Then there's the blood. The Locust are not reptilian terrors; their blood is as red as yours or mine. A frightening amount of attention has been paid to making the blood as real and abundant as possible. Every connecting bullet sends arcs of crimson liquid spraying in every direction, making each kill that much more intense and, oddly, satisfying. Bloodlust is further amplified by the melee combat system. Besides the traditional gun butt to the face, *Gears Of War* boasts other hand-to-hand moves. We particularly enjoyed Marcus' ability to stamp on the enemy's head and twist it into the ground, while the chainsaw mounted on the bottom of your rifle is a gratuitous way of dispatching foes. Such wanton violence may offend some, but *Gears Of War* is satisfying enough to make you forget such scruples.

As impressive as the game is, it's difficult to shake the notion that Microsoft may be relying on it to achieve great things. With so many promising action titles on the way – *Prey*, *TimeShift*, *CellFactor*, *BioShock* – there's little here that singles out *Gears Of War* for special attention. The graphics are stunning, but in all other senses this feels like a traditional shooter. There is, of course, nothing wrong with that. The question for Microsoft is, will it be enough?

■ The abundance of enemies results in a lot of close-quarters combat.

THE ICING ON THE CAKE

While the exact number of players has yet to be confirmed, *Gears Of War* will feature both Co-op and Multi-player modes. Remedy has designed each level with co-operative play in mind, and the game's emphasis on finding cover, and structured attacks surely suits the style of *Gears Of War*. We tried our hand at four-on-four multi-player where again the abundance of cover practically forces you to find new and cunning ways of luring the other team into the open. There was a slight concern over the fact that both teams looked more or less identical – very confusing when in close quarters – but with such an early build we have every confidence that this will be corrected in time for release.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Epic Games
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ The great hope for Microsoft to weather the storm of competition, *Gears Of War* aims to be the most significant Xbox action game since *Halo 2*.

YOSHI'S ISLAND 2 (WORKING TITLE)

NINTENDO CONTINUES THE 2D RENAISSANCE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Platformer
PLAYERS: TBA

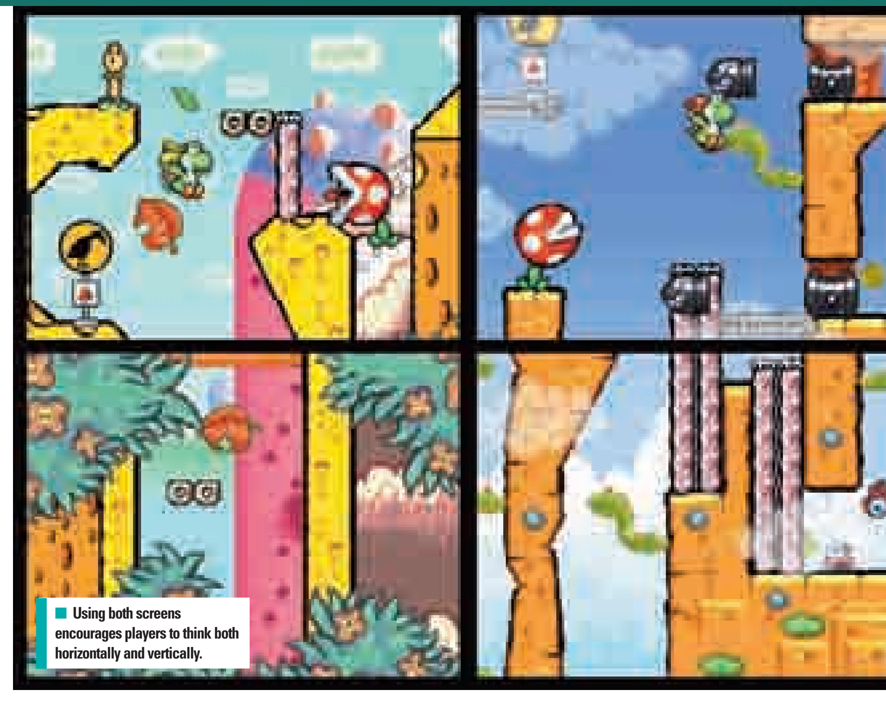
CONCEPT

- The long-overdue 'true' sequel to the SNES classic sees baby Mario joined by little Donkey Kong and Peach for dual-screened platforming heroics.

The artform of the 2D platformer will never die. It's so ingrained in game culture that the skill behind pixel-perfect jumping and high-speed, high-accuracy reaction gaming will never get old. Not as long as a certain moustachioed plumber is still around, anyway. Not content with his barnstorming return to form this month in *New Super Mario Bros*, Nintendo's eldest mascot is back on the DS.

This, the actual sequel to 1995's SNES classic (as opposed to N64's 'spiritual' successor, *Yoshi's Story*) is firmly back in Nintendo territory, lavished with care and attention and brimming with ideas. The hook for this second *Island* adventure is simple: as with *Sonic Rush*, the action takes place over both screens, taking advantage of the DS's unique qualities. As with the hedgehog's last outing, keeping an eye on both screens and thinking vertically as well as horizontally is a great tool for platform developers to play with. And there are few more capable than the creative minds at Nintendo.

Along with the new twin screen dynamic, *Yoshi's Island 2* introduces a mini Donkey Kong and Peach to the mix, which, as is



Using both screens encourages players to think both horizontally and vertically.

the Nintendo way, opens up new abilities for Yoshi to take advantage of on his travels. Donkey, for example, can cling onto overhead vines to allow Yoshi to reach hitherto inaccessible areas, or aid Yoshi in a powerful shoulder charge to get rid of enemies. Peach, as is her want, can use her parasol to catch air currents and float skyward. Control is unsurprisingly excellent, and anyone familiar with the original will be carting baby Mario and pals around the charming levels with ease. If you spot a stork soaring through the sky, simply jump upward and Mario will be replaced by one of his infantile friends.

And jumping is something you'll be doing a lot. It's definitely a case of 'if it ain't broken, don't fix it'. As is always the case when sequelising such a revered title, the danger of ruining the original's magic and upsetting its fan base is a constant threat. Nintendo is well aware of this, and so has stuck to what it knows better than anyone else – high calibre, inventive 2D platforming. *Yoshi's Island 2* will be met with critical acclaim at the end of the year.

> "CLASSIC NINTENDO TERRITORY LAVISHED WITH CARE AND ATTENTION AND BRIMMING WITH IDEAS AT EVERY TURN"



Along with baby Mario himself, Peach and Donkey Kong have come along for the ride.


eMag

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

TRY AND KEEP UP, THIS COULD GET COMPLICATED…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA '07
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

The latest instalment in the legendary series is coming to a platform that could finally allow Hideo Kojima's ambition to take full flight.

PS3

The rise of the 'cinematic' videogame has continued unabated for so long now that most would never have considered that there could be a backlash. However, with the next generation promising a new level of complexity, gamers are starting to pine for the days when playing on a console didn't involve hours of poorly scripted cut-scenes. It's evident in the burgeoning retro market, and Nintendo has answered these critics with the Wii.

Those longing for the simple pleasures that videogames used to stand for will not find a friend in Hideo Kojima. One of the pioneering forces behind the assimilation of film techniques into videogame style and narrative, his dense *Metal Gear* series has become more abstruse and convoluted with every release. Some hail his work as art and the very pinnacle of what games have achieved. Others claim that when compared to the medium he so desperately tries to imitate, his work amounts to little more than a good Kurt Russell movie, and serves to highlight only what games cannot accomplish – plot, depth, an emotion other than excitement.

None of this will dampen the feverish anticipation with which *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* will undoubtedly be greeted. The saga may have reached near-Marmite levels of selective appeal, but this is a new *MGS* instalment, and the first on a next-generation platform – big news by any standards. Kojima remains tight-lipped about the details, but the 15-minute trailer released at E3 provides some tantalising hints.

As a man in his Forties, Kojima has been quite open about the fact that *MGS4* will be designed for more mature gamers. The action takes place after the events of *MGS2*, with Solid Snake now an old man – grey but not frail. The trailer ruminates on the meaning of war in the modern age, while images of an army accompanied by hordes of bipedal Metal Gears play out underneath. America selling military firepower to the world, it contends, has made war into a commodity, a calculated business decision. This cash-for-death ethic has given rise to Private Mercenary Companies (PMCs) and solidified their power-base, leaving many of them as mighty as most countries. The problem is that the five biggest PMCs are owned and controlled by the same 'mother company'. They're joining to form an army, and guess who's the only man that can stop them.

The plot has echoes of the situation that exists in the world right now, and the trailer footage suggests that the game will be located in the Middle East. Kojima has never shied away from the cerebral, often incorporating provocative issues into his narratives, and *MGS4* looks set to continue this trend.

Kojima has been criticised in the past for making his games too complex, and little we have seen suggests that allowances have been made for those not already steeped in *MGS* mythology. But then, that is missing the point somewhat. *MGS4* is the ideal project for Sony's (and Microsoft's) view of what next-gen gaming should be. Nintendo wouldn't agree, neither would certain gamers, but for all those who relish the depth and maturity that Kojima's games foster, this could be the purest distillation of those virtues so far.

"LITTLE WE HAVE SEEN SUGGESTS THAT ALLOWANCES HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THOSE NOT ALREADY STEEPED IN MGS MYTHOLOGY"

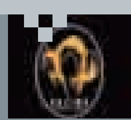
THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING

Perhaps the biggest question mark raised by the trailer is the fate of Snake himself. Kojima suggests that this won't be the last *MGS* title, yet the trailer states that Snake's body is deteriorating and he has just six months to live. The plot is set up as his final mission, the last thing he does before he dies. To top it all off, one of the trailer's final sequences shows Snake sitting in a concrete hut, looking at his pistol. He raises the weapon, places the barrel in his mouth and… well, there's a strategically placed cut-to-black accompanied by the sound of the gunshot, but all the signs point to one very lonely, very depressed, and very dead Snake. Say it ain't so.



The ageing Snake seems to be at a crossroads, one that could lead to his death.

Raiden is shown in full Ninja mode, dispatching metal gears with consummate ease.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

In the videogame industry, few names are as instantly recognisable as Hideo Kojima. Breaking boundaries since the very first *Metal Gear* game, he is regarded as perhaps the most sophisticated of game designers, filling his titles with adult themes and post-modern ideas.

HISTORY

- **BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND** 2003 [GBA]
- **ZONE OF THE ENDERS** 2001 [PS2]
- **METAL GEAR SOLID** 1998 [PS]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

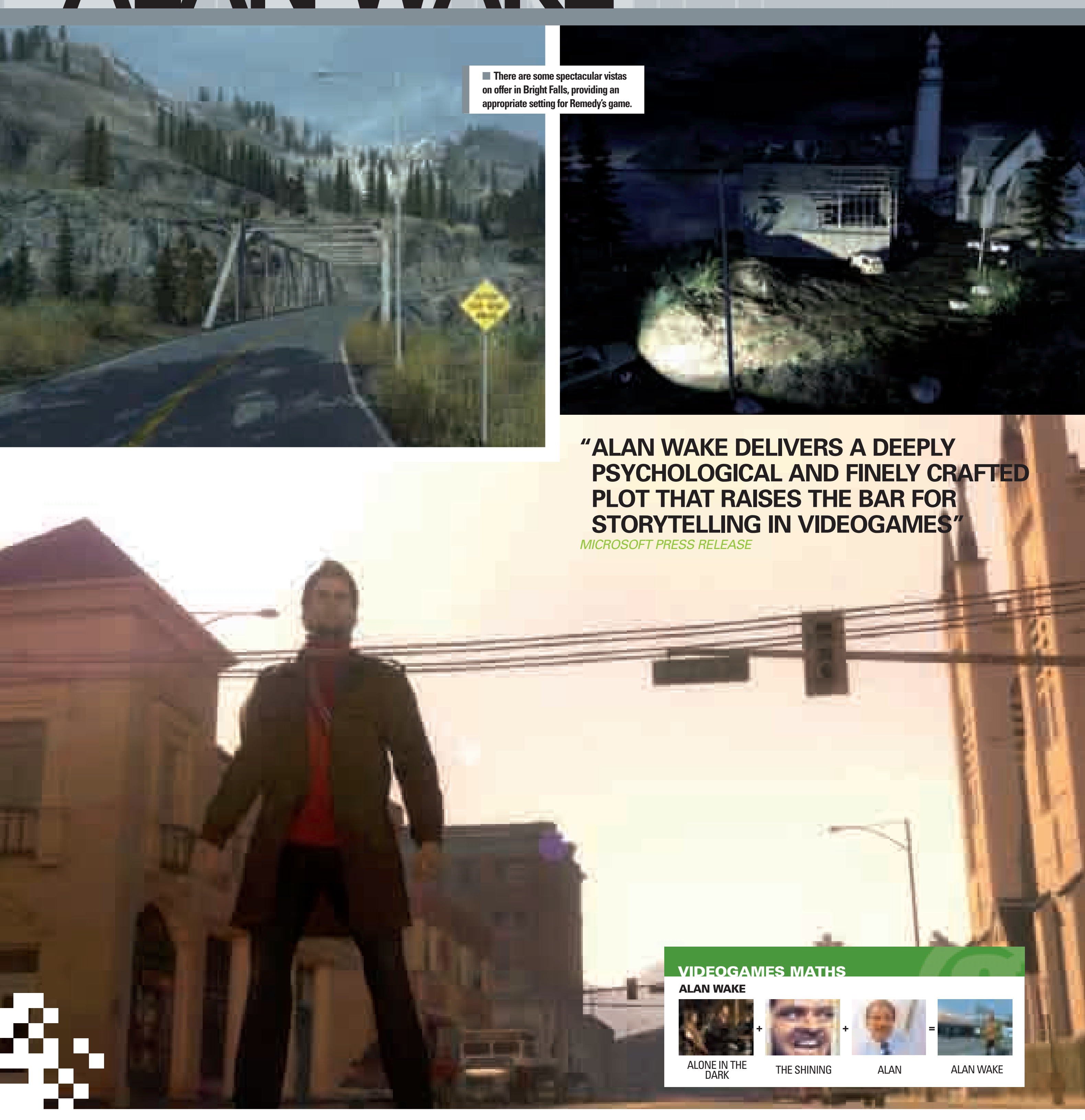
THIS IS THE END

MGS SAGA + GETTING OLD + SHOCK ENDING? = MGS4

"MGS4 BRINGS A TOTALLY NEW CONCEPT AND SITUATION RESULTING IN THE TOUGHEST METAL GEAR INFILTRATION MISSION EVER DEVISED"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

The trailer shows a group of metal gears laying waste to a war-torn city.

ALAN WAKE



There are some spectacular vistas on offer in Bright Falls, providing an appropriate setting for Remedy's game.

"ALAN WAKE DELIVERS A DEEPLY PSYCHOLOGICAL AND FINELY CRAFTED PLOT THAT RAISES THE BAR FOR STORYTELLING IN VIDEOGAMES"
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALAN WAKE

ALONE IN THE DARK + THE SHINING + ALAN = ALAN WAKE

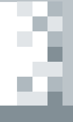


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Based in Finland, Remedy has made its name by working on *Max Payne* and its neo-noir sequel, *The Fall Of Max Payne*. *Alan Wake* marks the company's first foray into the next generation, and is shaping up to be something rather special indeed.

HISTORY

■ MAX PAYNE 2 2003 [PC]
■ MAX PAYNE 2001 [PC]
■ DEATH RALLY 1996 [PC]





■ Not exactly the most interesting-looking fellow in the world, but it's what's going on around him that has us excited.



■ Lighting is a running theme in the game; it actively affects the character's state of mind and so plays a vital role.

WAKING THE DEAD

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: Finland
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Remedy
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A new twist on horror – open environments, stunning graphics and a dynamic weather system. Interesting.

Psychological thriller. A term thrown around liberally in the film industry, but increasingly becoming part of the videogame milieu. Blame *Fahrenheit* if you must, but the future holds more of this brand of 'interactive fiction' than ever before, and *Alan Wake* is set to join this still infantile sub-genre. Remedy's stunning-looking adventure – now confirmed as a 360 and PC exclusive – is every bit as enigmatic and mysterious as it was 12 months ago. An appearance at this year's E3 has confirmed what many of the gaming cognoscenti already knew – Mr Wake is a very interesting chap indeed.

Set in the fictional town of Bright Falls, described by the publisher as "deceptively idyllic", *Alan Wake* is looking to redefine the horror videogame. The hook is simple: unlike *Silent Hill* or *Project Zero*, *Alan Wake* offers the entire town to explore. As with *Test Drive*, every inch of the environment is there to examine. How the game will be crafted in terms of objectives and narrative is unknown.

Clambering onto the bandwagon created by the popularity of *24* and *Lost*, both *Alan Wake* and Atari's new *Alone In The Dark* are promising an episodic mission structure. Each task is an 'episode' of its storyline. (We always thought they were called 'levels'.) Nevertheless, it shows Microsoft and Remedy's intent to push *Alan Wake* as something genuinely new and intriguing which, by the sound of the premise and potential gameplay, it most certainly is.

Thematically, *Alan Wake* is considerably more appealing than the usual videogame fluff. Wake's fractured psychological state worsens when he arrives in Bright Falls, and begins to manifest itself physically in the form of the malevolent creatures that inhabit the town's darker corners. The trailer shows him firmly clasping a handgun, so anyone clamouring for an entirely cerebral affair may be disappointed, but the unique "light as a combat element" mechanic is sure to place it in a slightly higher brow esteem than most. As the game progresses, summer turns to fall and the nights grow longer. Given that his nemeses draw their power from the dark, this poses a problem for Wake? Surely it's no coincidence that a game hailing from the suicide capital of the world – the land of 24-hour blackness, Finland – is portraying the dark as a source of insanity and impending doom. Thematically intelligent yet again.

Staying in the light is crucial to keeping Alan alive, and so the game's lighting engine is suitably magnificent. The trailer's use of accelerated time really shows off the grunt of Remedy's astonishing engine: the sweeping vistas of Bright Falls are seen in fly-over as light and shadow cascade over the forests and cliffs. It's breathtaking. If this is what can be expected from the future of the sandbox open-city genre of gaming, then the next generation will be a very pleasant place to be.

Alan Wake is brimming with potential, actually interesting, staggeringly attractive and noticeably different to anything else. We could be looking at the defining game of the upcoming generation.

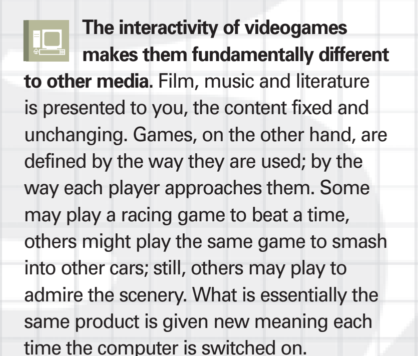
"WE COULD BE LOOKING AT ONE OF THE DEFINING GAMES OF THE UPCOMING GENERATION – EVEN AT THIS EARLY STAGE"

LIGHT OF MY LIFE

Normally, talk of lighting engines and dynamic weather is enough to send us to sleep, but in *Alan Wake* these influences have such an impact on gameplay, and are so damn impressive that they really warrant a mention. According to Microsoft, "the hyper-detailed environments of the Pacific northwest play an important role; even the change in daylight and weather will profoundly affect the characters and enemies in *Alan Wake*". Quite how remains to be seen, but this information coupled with the intriguing plot makes Wake's world a very interesting prospect indeed. Certainly, from a visual standpoint there's nothing that can match *Alan Wake's* truly stunning approach to rendering a real-life space.

TABULA RASA

LORD BRITISH INVITES YOU TO 'JOIN THE FIGHT'



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: NCsoft
DEVELOPER: Destination Games
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multi-player

CONCEPT

■ If MMORPGs seem to be a lot of walking and talking but with precious little action, then *Tabula Rasa* is building a bridge right to your door.

The interactivity of videogames makes them fundamentally different to other media. Film, music and literature is presented to you, the content fixed and unchanging. Games, on the other hand, are defined by the way they are used; by the way each player approaches them. Some may play a racing game to beat a time, others might play the same game to smash into other cars; still, others may play to admire the scenery. What is essentially the same product is given new meaning each time the computer is switched on.

This is especially true of the MMORPG, a genre with few constructed elements, where the quality of experience is almost entirely dictated by the number and dedication of its players. As they have grown in popularity, so too has the number of titles on offer, and while some, like *Roma Victor*, offer the experience of a specific time and place, the majority are generic spins on the twin camps of fantasy and science fiction. The cumulative effect of these factors makes it very difficult for anyone without a specific love of elves, orcs, aliens or marines to know where to begin.

Tabula Rasa could be the game to buck that trend. The fruit of the imagination of Richard Garriott, the creator of *Ultima Online*, Lord British to his friends, and all-round legend, an MMORPG couldn't ask for a better pedigree. The plot is your typical risible nonsense – the universe is being terrorised by the vicious Bane, and only the Eloh and their army of Allied Free Sentients can stop the destruction – but



■ *Tabula Rasa* boasts a whole host of far-flung worlds to visit and, more importantly, wage war upon.

> "TAKING A SABBATICAL TO WORK ON YOUR VIRTUAL GARDEN WILL NO LONGER BE AN OPTION"

Tabula Rasa's approach to gameplay looks set to deliver an entirely new slant on the MMORPG formula.

Previously, the emphasis of an MMORPG was in simply existing in that world, forming guilds and meeting new people. With *Tabula Rasa*, Garriott is attempting to bolster the RPG and action elements, creating a story as involving as a single-player game, but one you can play with an army of your friends. Taking a sabbatical to work on your virtual garden will no longer be an option as the Bane are designed to aggressively attack you whether you want to be a part of the action or not. Supplementing this is an option to save your character's attributes at any moment, leaving you free to experiment safe in the knowledge that you can return to that point at any time.

By decreasing risk and placing emphasis on advancing the story, Garriott may have the most action-heavy MMORPG yet seen on his hands – the same hands, reassuringly, that virtually invented the genre in the first place. Those already knee-deep in the long-haul satisfaction of *EverQuest* may balk at such visceral thrills, but for the rest it's a tantalising opportunity to become part of the MMO revolution.



■ Players can use the Save function to experiment with different approaches and character types.


eMag

HEAVENLY SWORD



"AMAZING SET-PIECES MAKE THE ACTION FEEL LIKE A BLOCKBUSTER ACTION MOVIE, TAKING COMBAT GAMEPLAY TO NEW HEIGHTS"
SONY PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

KEY OF HEAVEN

GOD OF WAR + ONIMUSHA + PLAYSTATION3 = HEAVENLY SWORD

■ Norika's chains are superb for the removal of life from enemies, and are more than a passing nod to Kratos.

■ Carnage is the name of the game in *Heavenly Sword* – it's just pure mayhem.

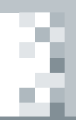


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Working out of Cambridge, Ninja Theory was one of the first development studios to fully commit itself to the next-generation console. The critically lauded *Kung Fu Chaos* is the studio's only previous work, leaving the firm free to focus all of its energy on the forthcoming *Heavenly Sword*.

HISTORY

KUNG FU CHAOS 2003 [Xbox]



NINJA THEORY'S WU-SHU ADVENTURE LIGHTS UP PS3

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Ninja Theory
RELEASE: 17 November
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

A beautiful third-person combat game that takes full advantage of the raw processing power of Sony's PS3.

A quick visit to Cambridge-based Ninja Theory's stylish website unearths the studio's creative intent. The firm "believes that the next generation of game consoles offers an opportunity to elevate the gaming experience to one that can rival film and literature". It's a lofty ideal, for sure, and one that many games in the last five years have tried to achieve – with limited success. After an extensive hands-on and demo at this year's phenomenally busy E3 though, the accurate facial animation and unparalleled fluidity of Sony's big launch hope *Heavenly Sword* is a clear indication of where gaming is going.

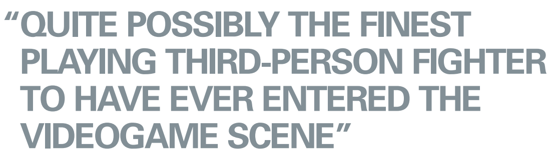
Almost the antithesis of everything Wii, *Heavenly Sword* is very much an action title. Combos, swords, speed and hyper-dramatic camerawork combine to create a game that at first glance could be described as 'Goddess Of War'. Yes, Ninja Theory's new combat epic is fronted by Nariko – a slender, muscular, feminine warrior who may just be the most engaging protagonist to have ever graced a videogame. Even her hair (apparently powered by 50 per cent of an entire cell processor, ridiculously) is so meticulously detailed that it makes *Dead Or Alive 4*'s poorly clipped locks look positively dated.

The character and vivacity of *Heavenly Sword*'s heroine is a sight to behold, but even that's not enough to convince us that her tale of swords and savagery will contain any emotional depth. Stories of conversational AI and enemies fighting in pairs (and reacting appropriately) smack more of entertaining tricks than real thematic integrity. No, what we have is simply the best looking and quite possibly finest playing third-person fighter to have ever entered the videogame scene. And do you know what? That's okay.

Heavenly Sword is about combat. Brutal, acrobatic, intense hand-to-hand combat. All else is secondary. From our time in its esteemed company, it was abundantly clear from where Ninja Theory drew its influences. *God Of War*'s system of combo chaining, quick parries and barbarous QTE-styled finishing manoeuvres is paid homage with every press of a button, but the weight, solidity and sheer impact of each of Nariko's actions supercedes it in every way. In our brief but fulfilling hands-on, Nariko was stormed by waves of malevolent soldiers in a gladiatorial arena. Needless to say, the soldiers didn't last very long.

Switching between twin hook blades and the eponymous Heavenly Sword itself, butchering foes is fairly painless. Face button combos activate striking camera angles and real-time slow-mo showing players the best view of the violence. Happily, scenery is entirely destructible leaving debris that actually stays on the arena floor, that can be used in combat itself (sweeping shattered tables into an antagonist's legs, for example). It all makes for a tangible fighting experience that makes much of the previous generation's efforts feel limp in comparison.

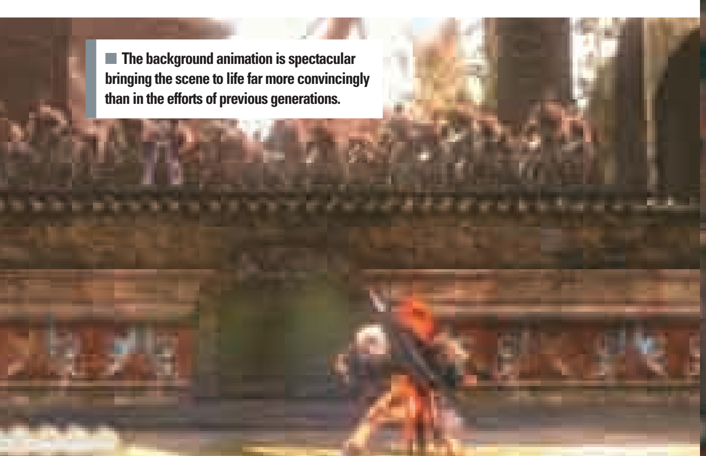
Which is why Sony is pushing *Heavenly Sword* to the moon. A beacon of light in an otherwise lacklustre E3 showing, Ninja Theory's fighter has the potential to show the likes of Kratos and Dante the genre's future. The next few months of development will show what direction the rest of this stunning game will take.



"QUITE POSSIBLY THE FINEST PLAYING THIRD-PERSON FIGHTER TO HAVE EVER ENTERED THE VIDEOGAME SCENE"

WARRIOR'S CODE

***Heavenly Sword* is not trying to redefine the way we interact with videogames, but rather give us more of the same, only bigger and better. The controls reflect this. Using just the facial buttons, players can hack, slash, parry and dodge to their hearts' content. No different from countless PS2 titles, you may say, but the on-screen results are light years ahead. The solidity of a CG movie but with the flexibility of *God Of War* – *Heavenly Sword*'s fighting is truly a joy to behold. If Wii is about innovation and 360 community, then PS3 is pure muscle.**



The background animation is spectacular bringing the scene to life far more convincingly than in the efforts of previous generations.



BIOSHOCK



This chap in the diving suit is known simply as Big Daddy, and he isn't a guy you want to cross.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

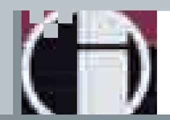
SHOCK HORROR

SYSTEM SHOCK 2 + WATER x MUTANTS = BIOSHOCK

"I WANT TO GET TO PLACES WHERE I ALMOST GET KILLED. I'M DOWN TO MY LAST WHATEVER, AND THEN I JUST PULL IT OUT. THAT'S THE BALANCE WE'RE GOING FOR THIS TIME AROUND"

KEN LEVINE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR IRRATIONAL GAMES

The city of Rapture is littered with unsavoury things – corpses line the streets.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Irrational Games made its name with *System Shock 2* which was lauded by many as one of the finest ever titles on the PC. The mix of action, isolation and unadulterated horror gave the gaming world something completely unique and the company looks set to score a hat trick with the forthcoming *BioShock*.

HISTORY

- SWAT 4 2005 [PC]
- FREEDOM FORCE 2002 [PC]
- SYSTEM SHOCK 2 1999 [PC]

A SHOCK TO THE NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEM

Choice is integral to the modern videogame experience. *Halo*, *MGS* and *Half-Life* may get the plaudits for visuals or storylines, but the key to their success lies in the choices they allow. If a situation or set piece can be approached and tackled in a number of ways, players can express themselves creatively, which adds to the immersion factor immeasurably. It's what Boston-based developer Irrational sees as the key factor in *BioShock*, the spiritual successor to 1999's *System Shock 2* – the opportunity to impose your will on a gameworld that reacts realistically to your presence.

From what we've seen, *BioShock* may well have pulled it off. Set in the underwater city of Rapture, the game has a very unique style, blending industrial sci-fi with art deco to mesmerising effect. It helps that the graphics engine is a behemoth – hurling particle, water and lighting effects around like small children – but it's *BioShock*'s phenomenal atmosphere and sense of place that sets it apart. The city is bursting at the seams: cracks in walls lead to water cascading into the environment, and at every opportunity *BioShock* reminds you that an underwater city is not a pleasant place – rotting corpses, algae, and all manner of bizarre creatures are around every corner. Hence the "bio" part of the game's title.

Rapture's citizens discovered 'Adam', a genetic material that could be used to enhance their own physical prowess. Suffice to say too much Adam led to disaster, and Rapture's inhabitants were left a little on the mutated side. However, unlike many other genre stablemates, *BioShock*'s monstrous denizens aren't simply baying for your blood. They have their own lives to lead, no matter how bizarre they might be. Big Daddy, the hulking brute decked out in full diving gear, proved this during our first steps in Rapture's vile streets. Trudging into view, Daddy looked casually in our direction before carrying on with his business. Needless to say a bullet aimed at his head would provoke a more aggressive reaction, but as he strolled on by, the impression that we were genuinely 'in' another world was tangible.

The same can be said of all *BioShock*'s 'enemies'. Irrational wants to deliver AI that can be described as independently emotional, rather than the human-like squad-based opponents that FPS players are now used to. It's admirable that *BioShock* is looking to sidestep mimicking the genre's leading lights. Even the weaponry is distinctly different. An early shotgun-style weapon is rudimentary to say the least – seemingly knocked up with old cans and bits of copper wire, it further increases *BioShock*'s realistic ethos. This game doesn't want you to think it's a game.

"THE GRAPHICS ENGINE IS A BEHEMOTH – HURLING PARTICLE, WATER AND LIGHTING EFFECTS AROUND LIKE SMALL CHILDREN"

■ There is a brilliant sense of atmosphere to the underwater world of *BioShock*.

■ Big Daddy isn't watching you; in fact we'd wager that he can't even see his own feet with that bulky equipment on.

Although it's not due out for some time, it already seems 2K Games is on a roll and has signed up another winner with BioShock. Following the highly popular *Oblivion*, the forthcoming *Prey* and now *BioShock*, life in the 2K garden is looking pretty rosy. And with another 12 months of development time left, we expect to be blown away come this game's release.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
RELEASE: TBA '07
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

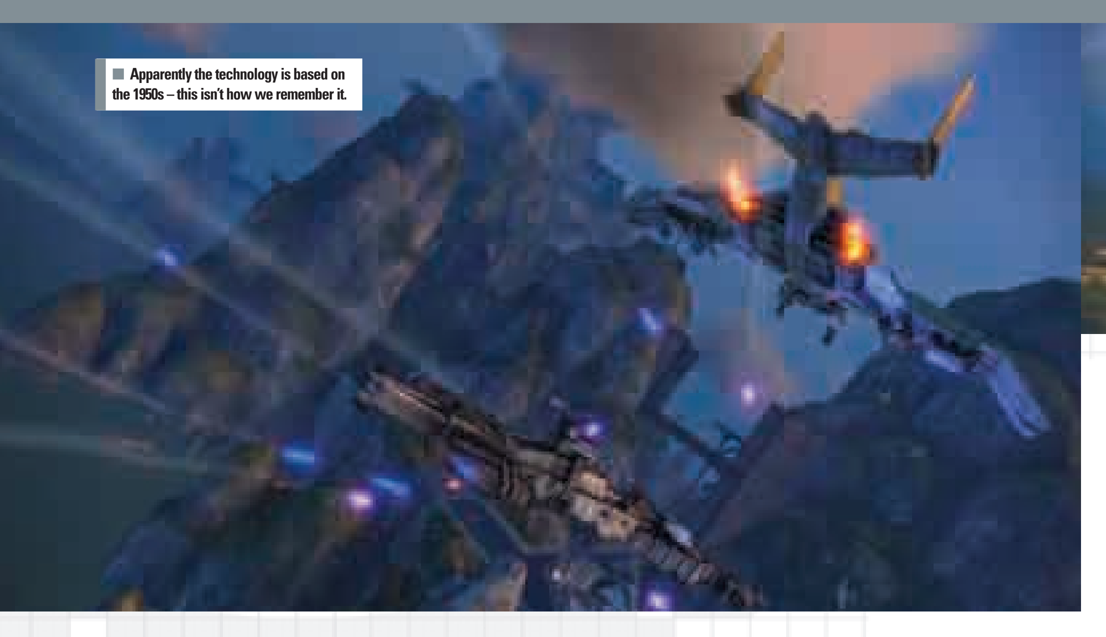
CONCEPT

■ Set in a vast underwater complex, the spiritual successor to *System Shock 2* is a terrifying horror FPS with an extremely unique art deco style.

BUILDING BLOCKS

BioShock features a character-building system similar to that of *System Shock 2*, but instead of nanotech-based upgrades, you'll gain biological augmentations called 'plasmids'. Purchased at 'Plasmi-Quick' vending machines which adorn the walls of Rapture, these plasmids can be ingested to upgrade certain abilities, and then interchanged to create different combinations of skills for tackling different situations. Weapons can also be altered and upgraded. Unlike most FPS titles, hardware will be littered very sparingly throughout the levels, placing the focus on improving your current pistol or shotgun with hardware scavenged from the city streets. It provides further freedom of choice for players in a game that is simply defined by it.

WARHAWK


Apparently the technology is based on the 1950s – this isn't how we remember it.

"IT'S CERTAINLY REASSURING TO KNOW THAT A MACHINE AS POWERFUL AS THE PLAYSTATION3 ISN'T ABOVE A BIT OF FUN"

IS THAT A PLANE, OR THE SOUND OF SONY QUAKING IN ITS BOOTS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Incog Inc
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA (2-32 Online)

CONCEPT

Reinventing the arcade aerial shooter for the next generation, *WarHawk* promises stunning visuals, varied combat and motion-sensitive controls.

PS3 **Nintendo's name-changing escapades – or Wiigate, as we like to call it – understandably took everyone by surprise.** So much so, in fact, that another, equally provocative nugget of information passed by relatively unscathed. After months of furrowed brows and stroked chins, Sony had finally looked at the silver banana they called a controller and scrapped it. That the replacement looked identical to the DualShock was a mild surprise. That it was to be motion sensitive was nothing short of flabbergasting.

Sony was understandably reluctant to be questioned on the motivation behind the change, but the vast majority took the view that this was a cynical attempt to copy the idea that Nintendo was pushing with the Wii. For a company that had been so confidently dismissive of Nintendo's direction in the preceding months, this was telling behaviour.

This was further corroborated at E3 by the developer of *WarHawk*, a next-gen update of the 1995 PlayStation title, which revealed that even they had only been given the technology a few weeks before. Many might normally have given *WarHawk's* arcade thrills a miss, but as the only PlayStation3 game on show that utilised the controller's tilt capability, Incog Inc was kept understandably busy.

Impartially judging the performance of such a raw piece of technology is vastly unfair, and needless to say the motion control felt tacked on, but in all other ways *WarHawk* impressed. It's certainly reassuring to know that a machine as powerful as the PlayStation3 isn't above a bit of fun, and playing *WarHawk* brought back fantastic memories of wasted summer afternoons playing *AfterBurner*.

Although your plane can carry up to eight different weapons, there were only three in the demo: a lightning bolt, a homing missile, and a multiple rocket launcher. The game's setting dictates that the technology has a 1950s feel to it, although the developer has clearly allowed itself some artistic licence. The flying and combat were both satisfying – the multitude of enemies allowing for some intense dogfights – and we're promised that the finished game will have a more open-world feel featuring ground combat missions, both in vehicles and on foot.

Incorporating all of these elements will be the Multi-Player mode, which can currently accommodate up to 32 players with that number set to rise by the time of release. The sheer volume of players, ease of use, and choice between ground and aerial combat could make this a fantastic online experience, and a linchpin for Sony as it comes up against the might of Xbox Live.


The majority of combat will take place in the air.


eMag

SPORE



This is our preferred approach to first contact situations. We're not very nice, apparently.

"THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN GAMING IS UPON US"
SPORE PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

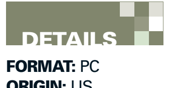
■ If you've ever played a game that simulates something and does it really well then there's a good chance that Maxis was behind it. From the phenomenon that was *SimCity* right though to the epic *The Sims* franchise, Maxis has been showing us how to live better lives for some time. Literally.

HISTORY



- **THE SIMS 2** 2005 [Multi]
- **SIMCITY 4** 2003 [PC]
- **SIMCITY 3000** 1999 [PC]

THERE'S CERTAINLY NO NEED FOR THE HARD CELL



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Simulation
PLAYERS: TBA



CONCEPT

■ Create a species and then see it through every stage of evolution. If you want ultimate control, there's nothing that even comes close to this.

It's obvious that games have been getting bigger. The gasps that met *San Andreas* when the sheer scale was realised for the first time are likely to be heard again when the next-gen machines progress from just visual foreplay and really start to flex their muscles, but it's worth noting that already a true giant is brewing on the PC – a giant that could well be one of the most expansive titles ever, to the point that the word limitless could be used in a far more appropriate way than when referring to a tireless Multi-Player mode or endless sandbox-style situation.

Spore has been talked about for a long while now, and it's always been assumed that this could be Mr Wright's finest work. For all the assumption, however, it's only now coming to light exactly how much potential is held and, indeed, how accessible a title that's earned the rather daunting moniker of 'Sim Everything' can be.

If you aren't 'in the know', then *Spore* is a sim that deserves such an impressive designation. This is not to be confused with a game where a singular life is manipulated. We are dealing with the control of ALL life here: from entities dwelling within the primordial ooze right through to empire expansion and, finally, space exploration and planet colonisation – it truly seems to offer direction on all conceivable scales.

Although *Spore* looks to be an epic experience that will demand large portions of time, it's good to know that other players will be involved in the way that every planet visited will be inhabited by creatures that have been created by others, meaning that each new area will hold its own range of fresh surprises. New planets and inhabitants can be approached in a variety of ways and the decision of whether you earn respect and worshipers through means of an impressive firework display, or trigger an intergalactic war by murdering a modest portion of the population rests firmly on your creations' well-crafted shoulders.

We say 'well-crafted' as the creature creation tool that you'll be met with at the game's outset – long before the intergalactic conflicts begin – has been demonstrated to us, and it looks hugely impressive. Forget the fact that Robin Williams turned up at E3 and displayed how easy it is to conjure up a creature – Robin Williams, apparently now the industry-standard inept games player – we've seen it ourselves and the detail and quality that's manageable in only a few short minutes can only be described as remarkable. Your primary creation, formed from the many Plasticine-esque parts available at the start, will gain stats by simply surviving, and earn Evolution Points by mating with others of its kind. These points can be spent on the newborns, blessing them with extra limbs for bonus speed or aggression, and so it continues until your avatar is talented enough to move on to the next phase. Throughout the game, you'll experience various genres and gameplay styles all revolving around your decisions and own creativeness.

It's clear that the level depth and immersion will pull *Spore* in front of a huge and demanding audience when the launch date rolls around – we'll certainly be there waiting for it.



■ It looks impressive, but it probably only took about ten minutes to create. Wow.

> "THE DETAIL AND QUALITY THAT'S MANAGEABLE IS NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE"

GOT, NEED, GOT, GOT…

The span of *Spore* is already fairly impressive, but there's also to be a further arm of play. As you meet new creatures you will be rewarded with a card stating the being's stats and the name of the creator. We've been told that these cards are going to be printable and that a separate card game will emerge where you can battle the different creatures that you've collected. There really aren't going to be enough hours in the day.

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN



The developer promises some atmospheric survival-horror-style levels of which The London Underground could provide the setting.

IT MAY BE BEAUTIFUL, BUT IS IT THE FUTURE?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 2 (2-32 Online)

CONCEPT

Like a Second World War game, but with a scary virus/hordes of monsters replacing the Nazis. Oh, and the Americans win this one too.

Despite the fact that there's only one next-gen console available to buy, we can get an idea of what to expect from the software. PS3 and Xbox 360 may not be too similar as machines, but the more games we see, the clearer it is that Sony and Microsoft have the same goal. One drawback of commenting on this 'revolution' is absorbing the sheer volume of insincere platitudes that arrive with every new release. The hype machine's in overdrive, but beneath the guff you can make out the bare bones of what will constitute each genre for years to come.

Developers have never been averse to releasing the odd FPS and as impressive as dynamic play environments, particle physics, HDR lighting and all the other bastions of the next-gen FPS are, if we threw our arms aloft every time a new game boasted its presence we'd likely be hospitalised with an RSI. It isn't the developers' fault – it's their job to make their games sound amazing – but in an industry running on speculation, the ability to detect quality inevitably suffers. Take *Resistance: Fall Of Man*, an FPS touted as one of Sony's PS3 launch titles. It looks beautiful, but then so does *TimeShift*; huge levels are promised, just like those in *Prey*; it has an amazing physics engine, but not compared with *CellFactor*; and there's innovative weapons and combat, just as in *TimeShift*, *Prey* and *CellFactor*. This doesn't detract from the quality we've seen, but it does raise the question of whether *Resistance* will really be the gold standard when it hits the shelves.

The action is set in Britain in 1951. WWII never happened because an altogether different form of evil – the Chimera – has been crippling the planet. A race of monsters that are actually humans in the grip of the Chimera – a particularly nasty virus – have already toppled most of the world, and the final stand for mankind will take place in old Blighty. And before you ask, yes, somehow your character still manages to be American.

> "WILL RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN BE THE GOLD STANDARD WHEN IT FINALLY HITS THE SHELVES?"

The level we saw cut to the chase straight away, and no sooner have your feet touched the ground than Chimera fire is raining down upon you. The battle rages in the decimated ruins of a rural town, and is evocative of WWII newsreel footage. The enemy lines stretch for miles in either direction and it is clear that where you attack is up to you. The Chimera come in numerous guises, but those we saw fell into two main camps – bipedal humanoid versions, and an arachnid form that looked something like a facehugger. The humanoid Chimera have a full range of specific weapons, while the arachnid kills by leaping onto an enemy's back and sticking its sharp tail through their skull. Should you spot an ally in such mortal peril, don't hesitate to step in. These are called 'hero moments', and whoever you save will return the favour.

This is only a taster of the finished game, and Insomniac insists we'll be treated to a range of vehicles and some huge Chimera. These elements could make for an intriguing mix, broadening the gameplay from the chaotic and pretty but hardly innovative level we saw. With *Prey*, *TimeShift* and *CellFactor* hot on its heels, it'll have to.

GUNS… LOTS OF GUNS

Despite a feeling of familiarity, *Resistance* does contain some genuinely innovative weapons. The 'Auger' fires rounds that burrow through walls to reach the enemy. Another weapon allows you to tag the enemy, making every bullet you fire swarm around the marked man; one more click of the trigger and the bullets race toward their target. Best of all was 'The Hedgehog', a bomb that detonates in mid-air, propelling shrapnel in all directions. Each gun will be equipped with both primary and secondary fire modes, and every weapon has been designed with a specific section in mind. *Resistance* may or may not turn out to be a world beater, but with firepower like this the multi-player is guaranteed fun.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Insomniac Games is that rare beast – an independent game developer that has actually enjoyed success. The brains behind the *Ratchet And Clank* and *Spyro The Dragon* series, Insomniac has shifted 20 million copies of its console titles. The company benefits from a close relationship with Sony.

HISTORY

- **RATCHET AND CLANK** 2002 [PlayStation2]
- **SPYRO: YEAR OF THE DRAGON** 2000 [PlayStation]
- **DISRUPTOR** 1996 [PlayStation]

These scorpion-esque Chimera kill with their razor sharp tails and claws.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HOW I WON THE WAR

WORLD WAR II – NAZIS + WEIRD SPIDERY ALIENS = RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

"RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN REWRITES THE 20TH CENTURY AND PITS THE US AND BRITAIN AGAINST A HORRIFIC SPECIES OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN"

SONY PRESS RELEASE

This staggering level of detail is fast becoming the norm with the next-generation consoles.

GUITAR HERO II



The bass is often thought to be as hard to play as a bicycle bell. Wrong.

"IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: RedOctane
DEVELOPER: Harmonix
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

There may still be plenty of life left in the first title, but Harmonix plans to have us all rocking out once again before the year is out.

PS2 **Thanks to this title's forerunner, the air guitar is dead.** For a long while the invented instrument served a purpose, allowing those bereft of the musical ability necessary to play a real guitar the chance to jam with the likes of Hendrix and Osbourne without risking the embarrassment of multiple bum notes, but now *Guitar Hero* is the first port of call when the urge to wail becomes all consuming.

Thanks to its massive appeal, the popularity of the first title soared and a follow-up was always going to emerge as soon as enough new ideas to warrant a sequel had been conjured up – but this has happened a lot sooner than we expected and by Christmas we'll have another batch of songs with which to test our digits.

It seems as if the team at Harmonix has taken an interest in what players of the first game wanted, and there's a fair chance that if you were one of the few who had any form of gripe with *Guitar Hero* it will have been addressed in this second instalment. For example, extended play soon found you honing your talents and leaving players with less time on their hands struggling on easier difficulty levels. Not a problem until you wish to play multi-player with these friends and find that you either have to meander through their simplistic plane of play or punish them as they attempt a track that's closer to your superior skill level. As you've probably guessed, this crease has been ironed out and now competing players can select separate difficulty levels. Better still, each track will have a second instrument meaning that when in the all-new Co-Op mode, Player Two can comple ment Player One's soothing lead tones with either a bass or rhythm guitar track.

Also, upon play we couldn't help noticing that the difficulty level has been tampered with a little. It's harder – quite a bit harder actually. Despite Hammer-ons and Pull-offs being a little more forgiving and the Easy mode still being a rather gentle introduction to the game, the top difficulty levels have been kicked up a notch, presumably to test those who have managed to ace the entire song list in the first game.

Although the full list of available tracks hasn't been announced yet, we're fairly sure there'll be some hard rocking going on, and with acts such as Primus and The Butthole Surfers already confirmed, Christmas can't come soon enough.

"THE TEAM AT HARMONIX HAS TAKEN A LOT OF INTEREST IN WHAT PLAYERS OF THE FIRST GAME WANTED"



There may be new characters, but will any of them be better than the Reaper?

Despite being quite tough, we tend to shoe-gaze while playing.


eMag

PREY



It's time to take cover if you see a conspicuous red laser flashing in your general direction.

Complicated storyline, ambitious design, unique gameplay. Can Human Head Studios actually pull this off?

2K GAMES' SHOOTER FINALLY NEARS COMPLETION

There's always been an air of concern surrounding *Prey* here at games™. For all its lofty ideals, redefinition of the boundaries of 3D game space, high-concept level design, and the bafflingly original gameplay elements evident in the numerous trailers of the last year, we were nevertheless confused as to exactly how it would all work. The danger of *Prey* becoming too confusing to enjoy was a real threat. Thankfully, after a heavy chunk of single-player and 60 minutes of deathmatch insanity, we can happily report that 2K Games is well on its way to publishing its second 2006 videogaming classic. *Prey* is something very special indeed.

For those who are still in the dark when it comes to Human Head Studios' revolutionary shooter, the premise is anything but simple. Players take control of Tommy, a Cherokee Indian living on a reserve, whose peaceful life is disturbed when an alien ship sucks him and his close ones from their gentle existence and into the most bizarre, terrifying and confusing spaceship ever conceived. Imagine Freddy Kreuger creating a videogame and you're close to the insanity of *Prey's* level design. Walking into (and up) vertical walls, going through time portals into other dimensions, entering seemingly tiny boxes that reveal themselves to be entire rooms is disorientating, bewildering and consistently brilliant. Within 90 minutes of the single-player, we witnessed more invention, ingenuity and excitement than in the majority of most full games.

As an FPS, *Prey* finds influence in the *Quake* and *Doom* territories rather than the likes of *Flashpoint* or *Call Of Duty*. It's very much a blaster focusing on moments of incredible intensity and terror rather than carefully considered combat, but that in no way means that the game is lacking in intelligent opponents. Sitting alongside the traditional 'rush' enemies are alien marines who form teams, use cover intelligently, snipe and throw grenades. Taking on a group of these grotesquely cunning creatures is not dissimilar to encountering a troop of Halo Elites. No bad thing.

Prey is an incredibly organic title – not just in the metaphysical videogame sense, but also literally the ship is reminiscent of a Geiger 'Alien' structure. Life pulsates from its very walls, and this is reflected in the inspired choice of weaponry. The first gun encountered in single-player is a glowing neon assault rifle which lights up the screen when held, and throws an almost leech-like sight up to the player's eye when its scope function is activated. In truth, it acts just like any other machine gun, but its otherworldly incandescence makes it feel like you're holding a living creature. Which you actually are when it comes to throwing grenades – ugly spider aliens whose legs can be ripped off and hurled at enemies… with explosive effect.

What sets *Prey* apart from all the other 'also ran' FPS titles is the fact that it is littered with moments of pure inspiration. An early moment saw us enter a room containing a rock in a glass case. Nothing out of the ordinary… until we passed through the next door and appeared ON the rock, in shrunken form. An enemy came into the room, peered through the glass (appearing as a giant), and then, before we had a chance to come to terms with what was happening, the rock was crawling with enemies. An incredible set piece – one of many, no doubt. Next month, and the promise of full review code, cannot come quickly enough.

"MOMENTS OF PURE INSPIRATION SET PREY APART FROM OTHER 'ALSO RAN' SHOOTERS"

DETAILS

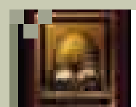
FORMAT: PC, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: (PC) Human Head Studios/(360) Venom
RELEASE: 14 July
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

The most original shooter in years is finally here. Bold, daring, fascinating and terrifically entertaining, *Prey* could change the genre forever.

MULTI-PREYER

***Prey's* multi-player is simultaneously wildly original and distinctly 'done'. The concept of hoarding the best weapons, circle strafing and accurate blasting are nothing new, but when its set in some of the most confounding arenas ever conceived, it changes matters considerably. As with the single-player, the use of wall-walking, portals and countless other visual and special tricks means strategy in a *Prey* deathmatch is quite unlike anything else. Having to cope with the effects of gravity, paradoxical level design and some seriously heavy weaponry means that this is a far cry from *Quake 4*. With up to eight players, its not the biggest deathmatch in existence, but there's a lot to be said for quality over quantity.**



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Human Head Studios is hoping that *Prey* will establish it as a major player in the videogame industry. Having previously worked on solid Wild West FPS *Dead Man's Hand,* and the popular *Rune,* Xbox 360's *Prey* marks the firm's first real push toward the mainstream.

HISTORY

- **DEAD MAN'S HAND** 2004 [Multi]
- **RUNE: VIKING WARLORD** 2001 [PS2]
- **RUNE** 2000 [PC]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PREY FOR SALVATION

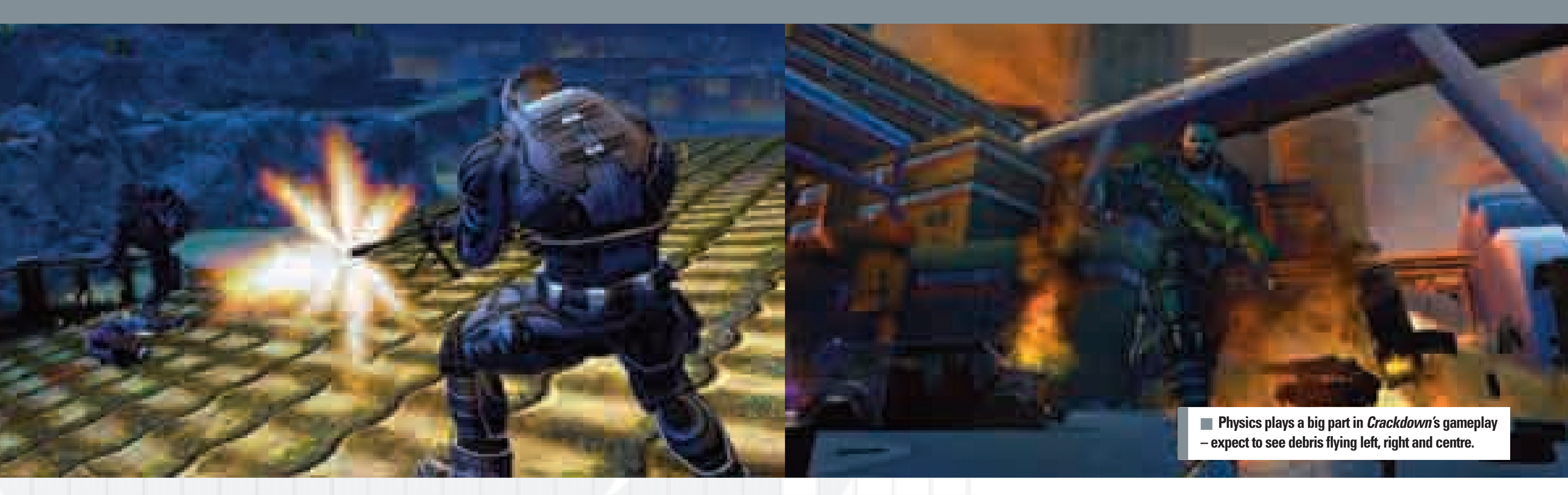
QUAKE 4 + HALO x NUTS = PREY

"PORTAL TECHNOLOGY ADDS A NEW DIMENSION TO GAMEPLAY, ALLOWING ENEMIES TO APPEAR OUT OF THIN AIR, AND CREATES NEW AND COMPLETELY ORIGINAL PUZZLES AND GAMEPLAY STYLES"

2K GAMES PRESS RELEASE

■ Expect many moments like this. Getting used to the revolutionary use of 3D space isn't as confusing as it looks.

CRACKDOWN



Physics plays a big part in *Crackdown's* gameplay – expect to see debris flying left, right and centre.

REAL TIME WORLDS LAYS IT DOWN

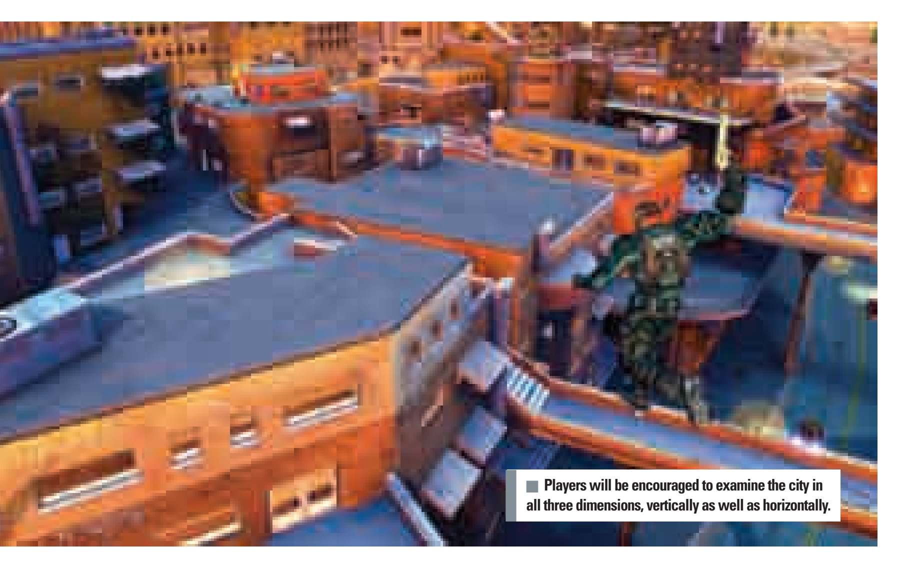
Remember that scene in *A Clockwork Orange* where a restrained Malcolm McDowell has horrific imagery forced into his eyes for seemingly hours on end? Kubrick had clearly just got back from E3 before shooting it. After days of subjection to countless new videogames all trying to peddle a different version of a well-trodden theme, it's hard to separate the good from the bad, the inventive from the generic, the inspirational from the turgid. On the other hand, you sometimes get to see a game like *Crackdown* and the distinction becomes a little clearer.

For starters, games should never be this purple. Unless it happens to be an epic Mizuguchi-helmed journey through music, light and evolution, the overuse of such a putrid colour should be immediately admonished. Especially if the title in question happens to be a next-generation *GTA* clone. First impressions are incredibly important in the videogames industry, and a demonstration of a shiny sports car careering through the very purple streets of Pacific City is probably not the best way to go about it. Especially if it's going to be seen clattering through traffic, sending civilian vehicles flying into the air like bump-mapped cereal boxes.

However, as important as first impressions are, they can so often be misleading, and as such there are a few potentially tasty ingredients in the *Crackdown* recipe. In terms of story, it's certainly not looking to challenge the leading lights of interactive entertainment narrative – you're a super-cop tasked with cleaning up the streets – but a deep, integral physics engine and a fully fledged two-player online co-op may give *Crackdown* the edge over the pre-*Grand Theft Auto 4* pack.

It's this second feature that has sparked our interest. Two players can inhabit Pacific City's sizeable landscape at any time and can operate entirely independently of one another. Should you choose to meet up and lay down the law together then so be it, but it's not a prerequisite to gameplay. It's an undoubtedly fascinating prospect with limitless potential, but if *Crackdown's* urban sprawl is as characterless as these early indications suggest, then it will matter very little. Dull is dull, no matter how many people are involved.

As it stands, *Crackdown* has a long way to go before it can even challenge the PS2 *GTA's* crown. The promise of non-linear gameplay and city exploration really doesn't excite as it may have five years ago, and the unattractive visual treatment certainly doesn't aid the game's cause. Colour us unimpressed.



Players will be encouraged to examine the city in all three dimensions, vertically as well as horizontally.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Real Time Worlds
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

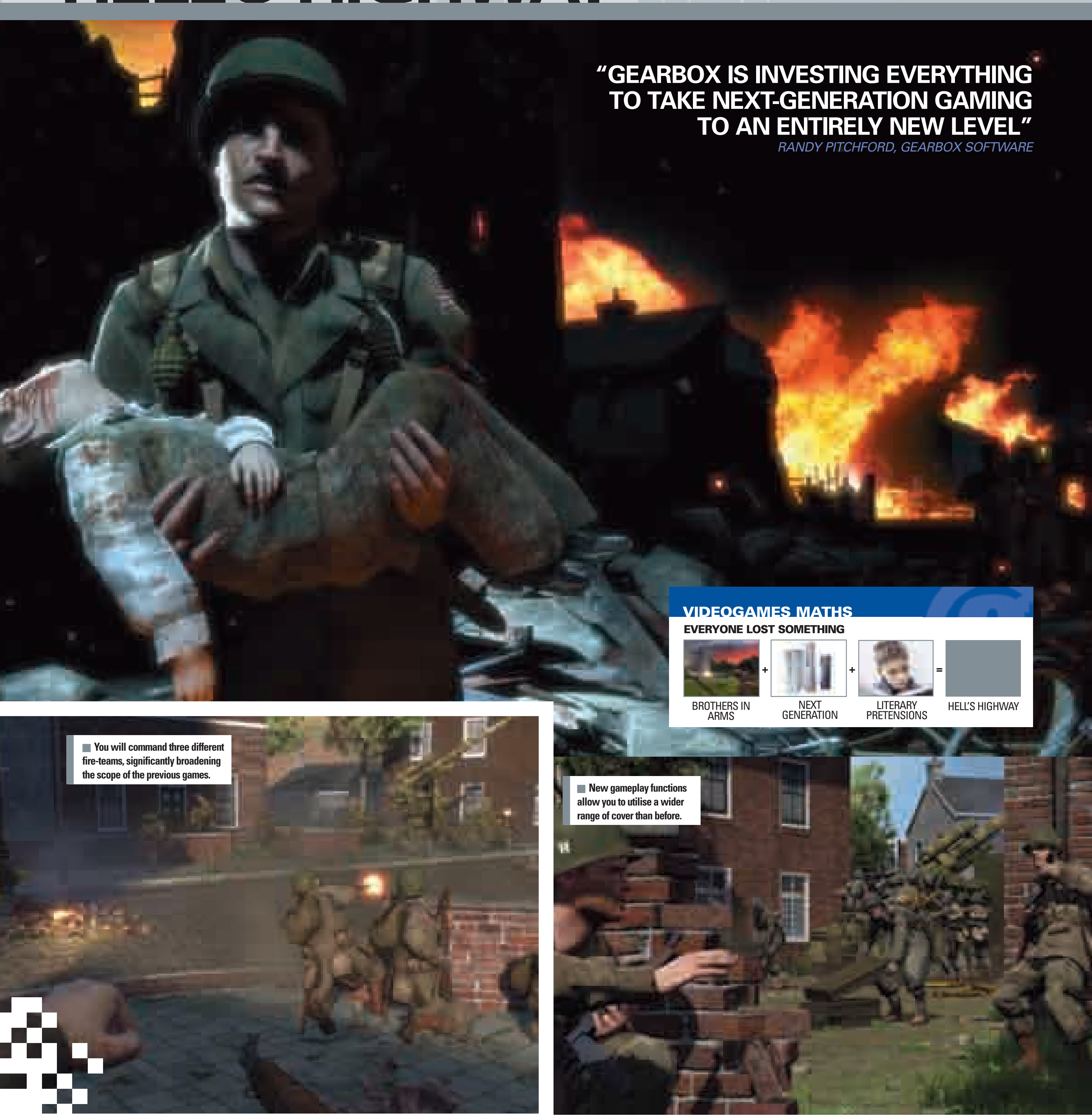
CONCEPT

A next-gen *GTA* clone with garish cel-shaded graphics and a massive world to explore.

"A FULLY FLEDGED TWO-PLAYER ONLINE CO-OP MAY GIVE CRACKDOWN THE EDGE OVER THE PRE-GRAND THEFT AUTO 4 PACK"


eMag

BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY



"GEARBOX IS INVESTING EVERYTHING TO TAKE NEXT-GENERATION GAMING TO AN ENTIRELY NEW LEVEL"

RANDY PITCHFORD, GEARBOX SOFTWARE

You will command three different fire-teams, significantly broadening the scope of the previous games.

New gameplay functions allow you to utilise a wider range of cover than before.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Gearbox initially made its name from porting established titles. *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike* both got the Gearbox treatment, but the success of *Road To Hill 30* and its sequel, *Earned In Blood*, established the company's reputation as an original developer of merit.

HISTORY

■ BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD 2005 [Multi]
■ BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30 2005 [Multi]



BLOOD, SWEAT AND, HOPEFULLY, TEARS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Gearbox Software
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ The third instalment of Ubisoft's think-n-shoot war opus. We're going out on a limb here, but it's for PlayStation3, so we're guessing the graphics might be better.

PS3 **A little history lesson: Operation Market Garden was an assault launched by the Allies in 1944 to capture a series of bridges in Holland.** The bridges crossed the Rhine, and may have proved decisive in the outcome of the war. 'Hell's Highway' was the name given to the road linking the bridges, which support forces were to advance along, relieving airborne squads from their positions. Tragically, a series of cock-ups led to a Nazi victory and 9,000 dead Allies. This is the operation that *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway* follows.

FPSs tend to skip expositional cut-scenes and get straight to the explosions, which can leave you with no notion of where and when you're fighting, or for what purpose. WWII games are possibly the worst affected. After all, being British virtually demands you have a sense of dominion over the events of the war – and we feel we know the story already. This is a shame because Gearbox has put a lot of effort into strong characters and a compelling story. The *BIA* series has distinguished itself as one of the more innovative out there whether you follow the plot or not. The major boon is that this is next gen through and through. Most 360 releases have been souped-up versions of current-gen titles, but *Hell's Highway*'s commitment to PS3 and PC suggests it will be bigger, deeper and more beautiful than its antecedents.

> "THIS BEING A BROTHERS IN ARMS TITLE, WE HAVE TO EXPECT OUR FRENZIED DESTRUCTION WITH A DOSE OF EMOTIONAL REALITY"

Cracks in the series have been papered over (namely the ability to go prone, mount varying kinds of cover, and vault over walls) while two additional fire teams – bazookas and machine guns – promise a greater intensity of combat and more choice for the previously simplistic squad control system. Unlike the other games where tactics could be ignored, *Hell's Highway*'s larger levels and sharper enemy AI should supplement the strategic difficulty nicely, with real planning needed to negotiate a successful attack.

This being a *Brothers In Arms* title, we have to expect our frenzied destruction with a dose of emotional reality. The previous games pushed the notion of a bond between your character and the men, and Gearbox insists that the theme of this is 'Everyone lost something'. There are nods back to departed friends, and the centrepiece level will be the German bombing of Eindhoven. The developer claims that, "this bombing was brutal with no prejudice given to age or sex". While this makes it clear what to expect, in terms of operation Market Garden – which claimed 25,000 lives in nine days – the bombing was more tactical than arbitrary.

Nurturing a sense of realism and loss in war games is something that should be encouraged, but it's also dangerous territory; taking a relatively marginal attack and presenting it as a hideous injustice suggests a subtly jingoistic approach. Perhaps the level itself may turn out to be an affecting triumph. Perhaps in the next instalment you'll get to firebomb Dresden and suck the life out of 100,000 innocent Germans in a single night. Perhaps they'll include 'philosophical discussion' and 'quiet introspection' buttons in the gameplay. It took decades to get past flag-waving patriotism in cinema; now that games are finally putting emotional depth in the war, let's hope they don't fall into the same trap.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Hell's Highway **is the third part of the** ***Brother's In Arms*** **trilogy, and, unlike most FPSs, the developer's taking care to create a compelling plot to run through the series. As a result, several squad members bear wounds from previous games – Baker has a forehead scar from** ***Hill 30***, **Hartsock lost his ring finger in** ***Earned In Blood*** **– and your character grows ever more grizzled, weary, and generally pissed off that so many good men are dying. We're promised major plot progression with** ***Hell's Highway***. **We'll actually have to watch the cut-scenes.**



■ *Hell's Highway*'s environments are completely true to place and period.

HAZE

FREE RADICAL DESIGN TURNS UP THE HEAT

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Free Radical Design
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ A gorgeous-looking next-gen FPS from the mind behind *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark* and *TimeSplitters*.

PS3 **FPS fans the world over let out a muffled yell of approval when E3 gave us our first glimpse of *Haze*.** The first foray into the next-generation battlefield from genre master Free Radical Design marks an occasion to be revered. Those who appreciate originality, skilful design and a smattering of humour in their first-person shooters should hold their hopes suitably high – it may be at a very early stage, but there are few shooters with the potential to match *Haze*. *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark* – that sort of pedigree simply cannot be ignored.

So far the screens look suitably gorgeous – every bit as next generation as one could possibly hope for. They instantly draw comparisons to the stunning looking *Crysis* with lush jungle environments and aptly hazy vistas. Despite their unquestionable good looks though, they do lack inspiration – it's far from the first time we've fought through the foliage no matter how green the leaves may be.

No, it's the trailer that has really made us stand to attention. A marvellous mixture of gung-ho patriotism and Verhoeven satire, it takes the form of a recruitment vignette for a militia corporation known as Mantel Core. A hilarious spokesperson talks directly to the camera interspersed with CG (or perhaps in-game engine) footage showing soldiers punching the air and throwing footballs. It's very *Starship Troopers*, very *Jarhead*, and a pleasant change from the usual. The end of the amusing teaser turns all *Universal Soldier*, with an infantryman suffering some sort of attack and turning his machine gun on anything he can see. Sets up the game's premise nicely, no?

Satire and humour in games can often miss the mark and end up coming off as forced, but after three effortlessly amusing entries in the *TimeSplitters* franchise there's no reason why *Haze* can't buck the trend. If there's one guarantee here though, it's that the multi-player will be absolutely superb. Five Free Radical shooters have provided immaculate deathmatches, so it's a pretty safe bet that *Haze* will also follow suit. Could it once again be the connoisseur's choice online, as *TimeSplitters 3* was over *Halo 2*? Quite possibly.

If the single-player campaign in *Haze* can match its inevitably superb Multi-Player mode then we could be in for a treat when it arrives early next year. With this, *Crysis*, and *Halo 3* all in the pipeline, first-person shooter gaming is looking stronger than ever. And long may it continue.

"SUITABLY GORGEOUS – EVERY BIT AS NEXT GEN AS ONE COULD POSSIBLY HOPE FOR. HAZE INSTANTLY DRAWS COMPARISONS TO THE STUNNING CRYSIS"



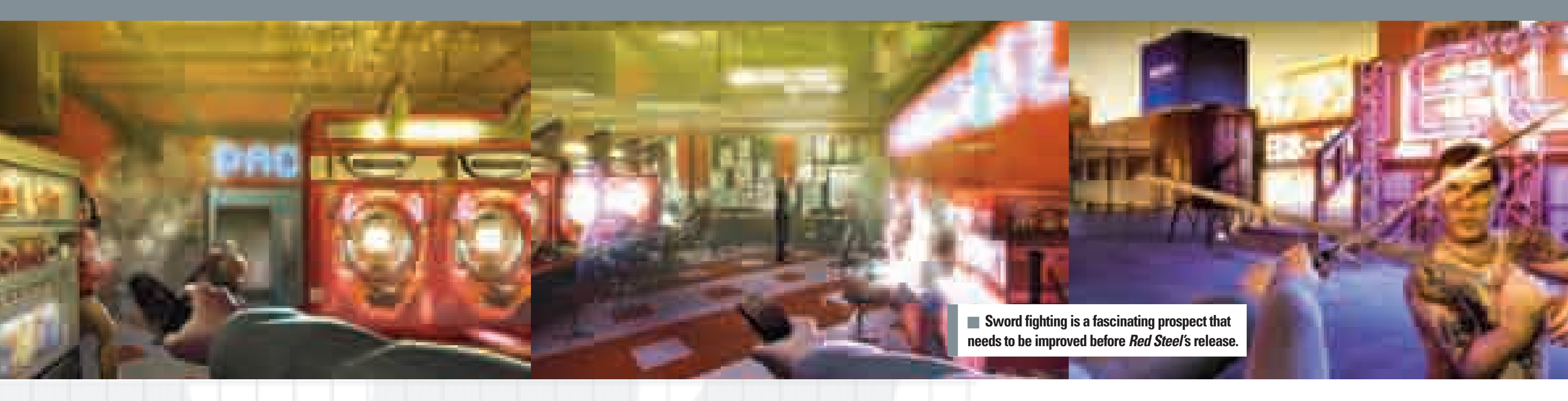
■ Vehicles will be fully integrated into the gameplay. Can you have an FPS without them these days?



■ A screenshot like this just speaks for itself. Give us this game!


eMag

RED STEEL


Sword fighting is a fascinating prospect that needs to be improved before *Red Steel*'s release.

BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

The first Wii FPS mixes gunplay with brutal katana battles to create something genuinely original.

After the barrage of traditional PC/next-gen console first-person shooters that seem to cover every corner of this year's E3, *Red Steel* is a pleasant surprise. Ubisoft's first attempt at harnessing the potential of Wii may not match up to the graphical prowess of the likes of *Crysis* or *Haze*, but, as Nintendo is so keen to point out, Wii is about so much more than shiny visuals. *Red Steel* takes full advantage of the nunchuck controller and is indicative of the types of gaming experiences we can expect from Nintendo's new machine.

Using the left controller's thumbstick to move and strafe, and the right 'remote' to look around and aim, *Red Steel* initially feels almost otherworldly. So used are we to using mouse and keyboard or twinned analogue sticks that this new third method of control is incredibly unusual. As you can aim with the right controller by simply pointing it in the correct direction, it takes time and practise to become anything resembling a marksman. As opposed to a lightgun, the Wii controller does not move a target around on screen, so to play properly you have to approach the controller with the mindset that the arm on screen is an extension of your own. After an acclimatisation period spent staring at the ceiling and missing enemies with unerring accuracy, *Red Steel* starts to sink its teeth in.

While looking like little more than a beefed up GameCube game, *Red Steel* nonetheless provides a gratifying blast with ragdoll Yakuza henchmen flying through the air, and all manner of destructible scenery. As the screenshots suggest, Ubisoft's tale takes place in a modern-day Japan's criminal underworld, which is clearly sufficient reason for the inclusion of katana battles as an accompaniment to all the shooting. At this early stage, the sword fighting is still some way from intuitive, relying on small swings of the controller, and feels too restrictive to be entertaining. Using the left controller to block and the right to slash, Ubisoft's Paris studio needs to spend time sharpening its blades for the sword fighting to reach its true potential.

And potential is something *Red Steel* has in spades. A genuinely innovative alternative to the sea of excellent but unoriginal FPS titles at this year's E3, and another reason to be excited about all things Wii. The next few months will be crucial to its success.

"UBISOFT NEEDS TO SPEND TIME SHARPENING ITS BLADES FOR THE SWORD FIGHTING TO REACH ITS TRUE POTENTIAL"


While the visuals don't match up to 360 or PS3, *Red Steel* is still a very pretty game.

Expect to be shooting up all manner of typical Japanese environments – this Pachinko hall never stood a chance.


eMag

FINAL FANTASY XIII

DEAL OF THE WEEK – THREE GAMES FOR THE PRICE OF THREE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC 2007
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ A whole new world for a whole new generation, *XIII* has no relation to the cel-shaded Ubisoft shooter of the same name from a few years back.

PS3 **This is starting to get ridiculous. No, not the fact that Square Enix's leading RPG series is still rocking a numerical suffix going into the next generation.** The fact that we're now supposed to be getting excited about two successive *Final Fantasy* sequels at the same time. With *XII* not due until the end of the year, it's going to be a long hard slog for *Final Fantasy* fans and trying to keep up with two sequels at once just makes matters a little more confusing for everyone involved. Luckily, we've played *XII* to death already so it's with a clear mind that we can approach what looks to be one of the main reasons to be excited about the PlayStation3 right now: *Final Fantasy XIII*.

To say that details are a little thin on the ground at the moment is as much of an understatement as saying that James Blunt is 'a bit dull'. The main feature dwelled on during its unveiling at E3 was the 'Fabula Nova Crystallis' concept that will see *XIII* being one of three games that will comprise the 'complete' package for this next *Final Fantasy* title. The other two games that will make up this strange trilogy go by the names of *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* and *Final Fantasy Agito XIII,* and although little is known about either, we do know that the latter will be a mobile game while *Versus* will be a PS3 title complementary to the main adventure that is *XIII*. Presumably this will be something more in the vein of *Dirge Of Cerberus* – an action-heavy approach is to be expected given that the *Kingdom Hearts* team is handling *Versus*.

XIII's combat looks to follow on pretty closely from *XII*, using a real-time system albeit with a new take on the Active Time Battle system. Actions can be queued along the bottom of the screen up to a specific cost, which will no doubt rise as your character levels up. Specifics are again sparse, but this system should allow you to act quickly with single attacks or chain moves together for more damage with a slower start-up. Also interesting is that the battle system almost incorporates Wait mode too, time slowing down while the player picks an attack and a target before zooming back up to full speed once inputting is over. This should add new dynamics to encounters with enemies, which will be displayed on the mini-map rather than thrown randomly at you as you wander. There's a Limit Break-esque system in place as well – Overclock mode looks to power up characters while a blue aura surrounds them and will no doubt grant access to more flashy attacks and specials as the game goes on.

With Tetsuya Nomura back on character design duty, the game's style shifts back toward the likes of *VIII* and *X* – with the last two *Final Fantasy* games, Nomura was involved only in promotional artwork and his return to a more integral role will no doubt delight fans of the series. Despite the fact that PlayStation3 is set to launch in this country by the end of the year, you can rule out the notion of seeing *XIII* as a launch title. No, it'll be well into 2007 by the time this mammoth project nears completion, but while the Fabula Nova Crystallis idea is an interesting one, you can't help but fear that Square Enix could end up spreading itself too thinly across three separate games rather than focusing on making *XIII* the explosive next-gen debut it so needs to be. Expect to see more following the Tokyo Game Show in a couple of months.



■ All we know about *Final Fantasy XIII* is that it should look bloody marvelous on PS3.

■ Is Square Enix taking on more than it can chew with these sequels?

"COMBAT LOOKS TO FOLLOW ON PRETTY CLOSELY FROM XII, USING A REAL-TIME SYSTEM ALBEIT WITH A NEW TAKE ON THE ACTIVE TIME BATTLE SYSTEM"

THE WHITE STUFF

Given Square Enix's work for Sony platforms over the last couple of generations – from making RPGs 'cool' with *Final Fantasy VII* to pushing the PS2 to its limits with *XII* – you can pretty much guarantee that Sony will be hoping to continue its success story long into the next generation. Already it has created the White Engine that *Final Fantasy XIII* will run on, which should make development of future titles that much less time-consuming and costly, and with so many high-profile franchises, we can safely assume that Sony is going to want to keep Square Enix friendly. You know, if only to absolutely wipe out Xbox 360 in Japan when the PS3 launches…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

As you may or may not have learned from the Square Enix series that has been running for almost 20 years, 'final' does not always mean what you might expect it to mean. In actual fact, it generally seems to mean 'expect another one in a year or so', which is a little odd.

HISTORY

- **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 FINAL TUNED** 2004 [Arcade]
- **FINAL FIGHT** 1989 [Arcade]
- **FINAL FANTASY** 1987 [NES]

"THE LATEST IN CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN UTILISED IN DEVELOPMENT OF FINAL FANTASY XIII, THUS MAKING THIS NEWEST ADDITION TO THE FINAL FANTASY SERIES WORTHY OF THE TITLE 'NEXT GENERATION'"

SQUARE ENIX PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THREE TIMES THE GAME, APPARENTLY

RPG + ACTION + COMMUNITY = FINAL FANTASY XIII

Tetsuya Nomura is back in the character design saddle.

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8



■ Environments now benefit from the artistic bloom of next-gen HDR lighting.

"IT WOULD APPEAR THAT TONY'S CREW HAS RESTED ON ITS LAURELS FOR LONG ENOUGH NOW"

THE EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, PS3, PSP Xbox, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ The eighth in the unfeasibly successful *Tony Hawk's* series finally delivers a new engine and a new way to play.

That Activision and Neversoft would combine once again for the eighth iteration of Tony Hawk's phenomenally popular skating series was never in doubt, but the appearance of a brand-new engine and a slick design overhaul has proved a pleasant surprise. As opposed to the thoroughly disappointing *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland* (especially on Xbox 360 where the game saw next to no improvement on its current-gen cousins), it would appear that Tony's crew has rested on its laurels long enough now.

In a brief but stylish trailer, skate legends Rodney Mullin, Paul Rodriguez and Stevie Williams grind and flip their way through grimy urban environments while the camera focuses on the techniques and skills they use to manipulate the deck. It marks a potential change of direction for the series – might we see Tony finally move into the realm of PSOne classic *Thrasher: Skate And Destroy*, and represent skating as a much trickier endeavour than previous *Hawk's* games have had us believe?

The integration of advanced ragdoll physics certainly suggests it may. Unlike the canned animations of years gone by there's now a genuine weight and momentum to the tricking and bailing. Remember how much amusement could be drawn from chucking *Amped 3's* prone boarders off huge cliffs and down unhealthily steep inclines? Well, in *Tony Hawk's Project 8* Neversoft is aiming to let players recreate the kind of action usually reserved for the brutal bail tapes that can be bought under the counter at skate shops nationwide. There's nothing quite like breaking a videogame character's ankle. Repeatedly. Is there?

Bone shattering has its limits though, and Neversoft is keen to affirm *Project 8's* status as the most comprehensive *Tony* title yet. Set in a free-roaming environment and delivering "continuous skating" (hopefully not a cop-out akin to *American Wasteland's* insipid grind-to-new-areas nonsense), and featuring more challenges than any other *Hawk's* game, we're promised unparalleled interaction with NPC pro skaters, civilians and the environment. Moveable ramps and rails allow players to create their own lines on the fly, and a natty image in Picture mode shows your skating ability from myriad fish-eyed angles.

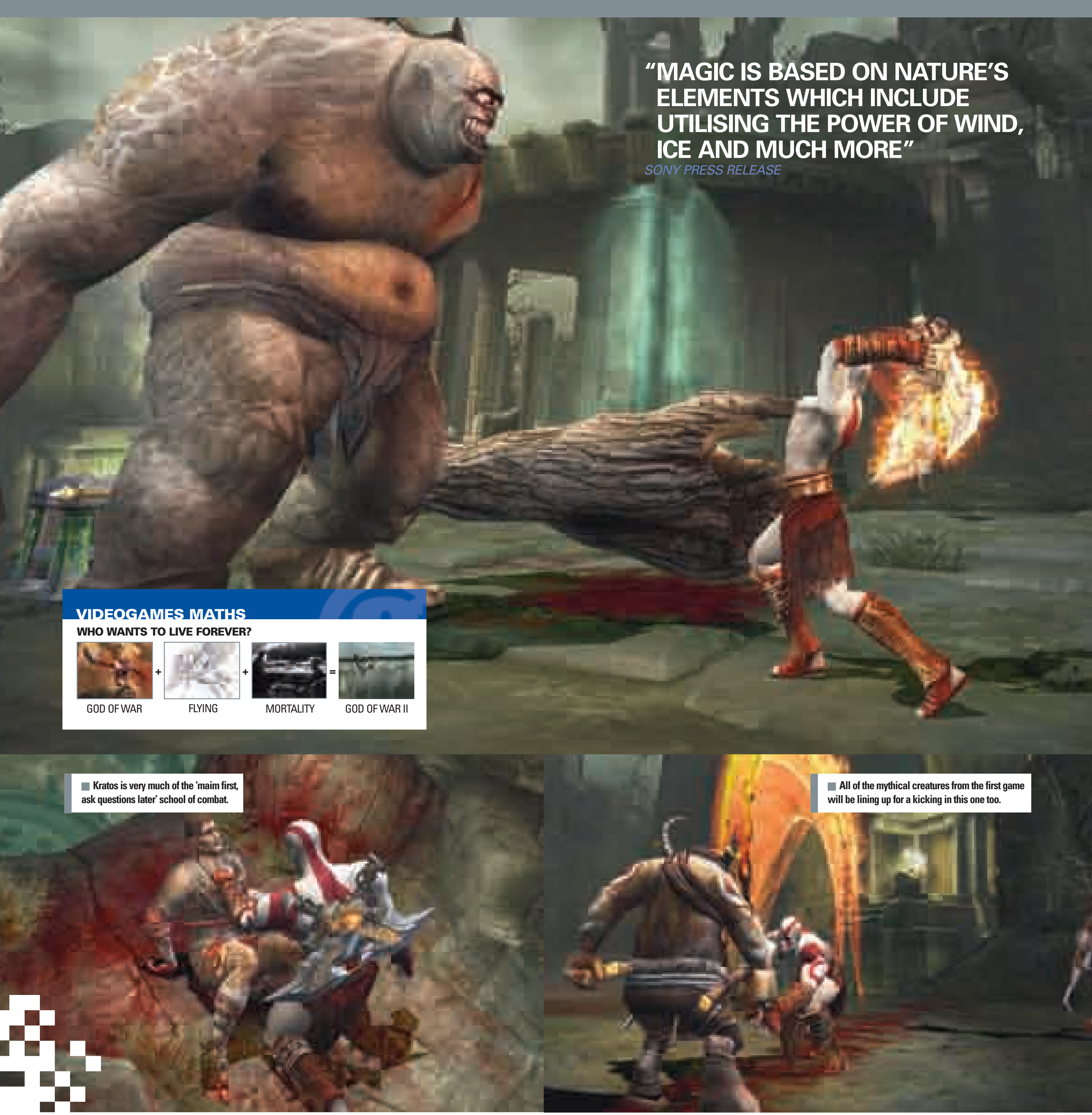
The future is looking bright for Hawk and his band of merry misfits. Losing the forced *Jackass* wackiness and focusing on the skating is definitely the right move, and if the game can find the balance between fast combo-laden grinding and stylish art direction then *Project 8* could be Tony's finest moment up until now.



■ Stevie Williams doing what he does best. The detail on the skaters is vastly improved upon previous efforts.


eMag

GOD OF WAR II



"MAGIC IS BASED ON NATURE'S ELEMENTS WHICH INCLUDE UTILISING THE POWER OF WIND, ICE AND MUCH MORE"
SONY PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?

GOD OF WAR + FLYING + MORTALITY = GOD OF WAR II

■ Kratos is very much of the 'maim first, ask questions later' school of combat.

■ All of the mythical creatures from the first game will be lining up for a kicking in this one too.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Like Electronic Arts, a developer the size of Sony is involved with so many different studios that its products don't really have a distinct personality, and, as with every other superpower, for every triumph there are just as many misfires – *24: The Game*, we mean you.

HISTORY

- **SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS** 2005 [PS2]
- **GOD OF WAR 2005** 2003 [PS2]
- **ICO** 2001 [PS2]



DIVINE BEING OR FALSE PROPHET?

Arriving with relatively little fanfare in America, the ecstatic critical reception *God Of War* received made it a word-of-mouth hit when it finally crossed the Atlantic to the UK. A heady mix of compelling mythology, intense scrolling combat and fiendishly tricky puzzles, this game was a multi-tasker. It now stands as one of the finest titles to emerge on PS2, meeting every challenge it set for itself. Despite the limited power of the platform, it even managed to look the business too.

Following up such a well regarded game is never easy, so it's surprising to find that *God Of War II* will be PS2 exclusive. By the time *GOW2* hits shelves the PS3 should have been out for months, yet Sony has decided not to capitalise on the increased power and freedom of the next gen, choosing instead to give its departing console one last hurrah. Odd decision. As mightily impressive as what we've played of *God Of War II* is we couldn't help but wonder what the brawn of the PlayStation3 might have brought to the table.

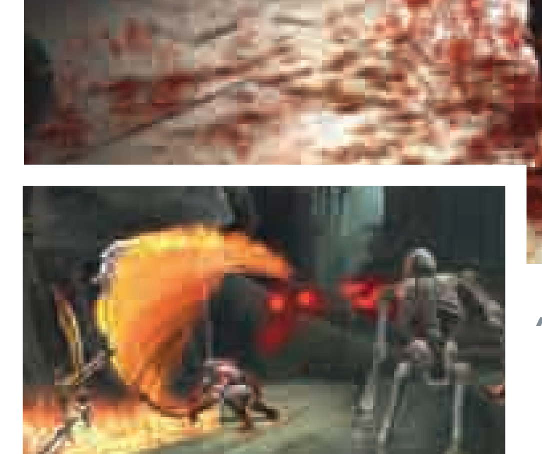
You take control of Kratos, the ambiguous hero from the first game, and the demo sees him crashing down from the heavens into a sinister jungle containing a vast, crumbling temple. The temple has a carving of the head of Medusa's sister – who is understandably miffed at you for offing her sibling in the first game – above the door, which will turn to stone anyone who comes too close. The main goal was to reach a distant platform and retrieve a fleece to protect you against its power. This blend of *Tomb Raider*-style puzzling and Greek mythology will be familiar to fans of the original, and Sony seems to have crafted a sequel every bit as intelligent and brutal.

Again, combat is a major selling point, but while various obstacles throw up some nasty situations – being forced to use the corpses of your enemies to hold down a pair of levers, for one – there aren't too many new combat moves on show. There are several new spells including a very impressive range attack called a Wind Bow, but the most memorable additions have been made to the already impressive catalogue of enemies.

A new kind of skeletal soldier presented an interesting challenge, shattering into little pieces under the weight of our blows and then reassembling itself for another bite of the cherry. A stone Minotaur bested us by hiding itself as a pile of nondescript stones, then forming its body and attacking when we were most vulnerable. Best of all were a race of dual-axe-wielding pig creatures which climbed on top of a Cyclops, dug their weapons into its back and used them to steer the beast toward us. This is the kind of invention and detail that made *GOW* such a joy to play, and suggests there are a host of other surprises waiting in the finished game.

Few would have expected *GOW2* to be anything but brilliant, and while the demo left us feeling more than satisfied it doesn't seem to be a quantum leap forward from the original. Perhaps the power of the PS3 would have opened up new doors of possibility. Perhaps not. We just hope that by the time *God Of War II* is released, PlayStation devotees aren't so next-gen crazy that they neglect the rewarding experience this is shaping up to be.

The play-test didn't show many new combat features, but if we can do this we're happy.



> "WE COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHAT THE BRAWN OF THE PLAYSTATION3 MIGHT HAVE BROUGHT TO THE TABLE"

WINGS OF WAR

While broadening combat, level size and enemy variety is important for any sequel, the truly great ones usually contain an element that is utterly fresh and original. With *God Of War II* that looks likely to be the addition of levels set in the air. We saw awesome footage of Kratos leaping across the backs of Griffins in mid-flight, cutting off their wings and sending them crashing down to earth. Those who get their kicks from the mythological setting have also been given a reason to celebrate with the news that Kratos will be able to ride Pegasus the legendary winged horse to reach the ends of the earth in his quest to become mortal.

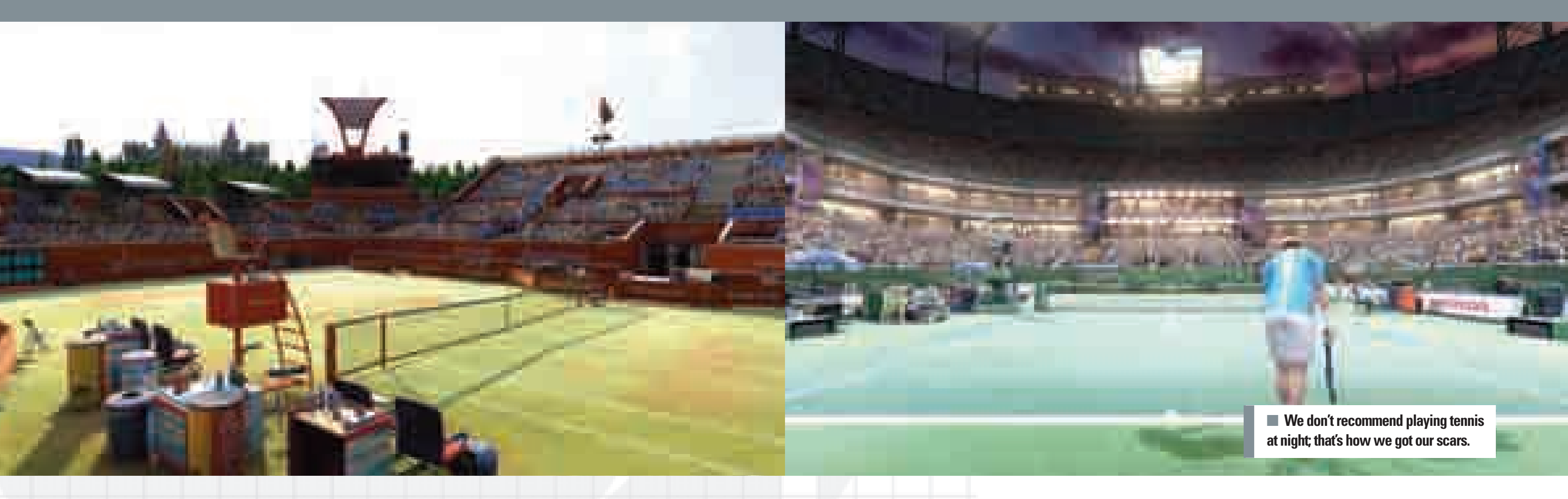
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '07
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

A hack-n-slash-n-think follow-up to the celebrated original, take control of Kratos once again as you whup several kinds of mythological ass.

VIRTUA TENNIS 3


We don't recommend playing tennis at night; that's how we got our scars.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PS3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '07
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

It's *Virtua Tennis*! Again! But prettier, and with better AI, and more online content, hopefully. It's not yet clear whether or not it will feature any new tennis stars…

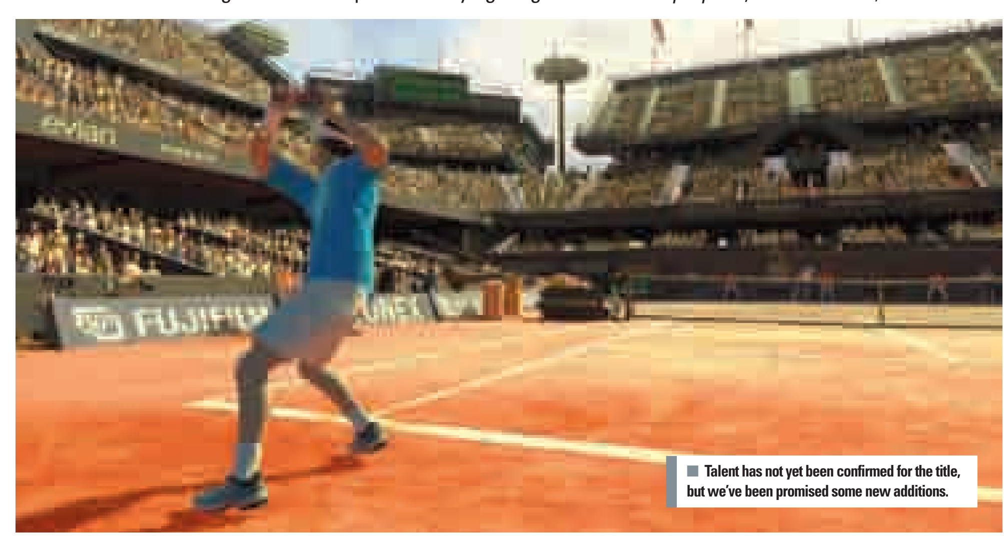
ACES HIGH, ACES LOW, ACES EVERYWHERE YOU GO

***Virtua Tennis* has always been one of the foremost stars of the videogame tennis world.** Where the *Mario Tennis* series throws realism out of the window and the *Top Spin* franchise finds itself a little too obsessed with it, *Virtua Tennis* somehow manages to encompass both. Easy to learn, hard to master – it's an arcade standard across the world. *Virtua Tennis 3*, on the other hand, will debut on Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 early next year, although an arcade version soon after seems a fairly certain prospect.

It's the graphics in this series that are to receive the major overhaul. Rather dangerously, Sega has promised photo-realism in the way the featured tennis stars play and react on the court. The game will incorporate a varying range of arenas from around the world, differing wildly in size, surface and location. The players themselves are likely to comprise real-life stars, but there's no word on exactly which talent will feature yet. We have, however, been assured that their virtual counterparts will bear a photographic resemblance to them, and that their animations will exactly match their mannerisms and facial expressions – according to Sega's creative director Matt Woodley you can even see the veins on their necks. Exciting, if perhaps a smidgen sinister.

There will almost certainly be some new players in the game, but Career mode also allows you to create your own characters (almost exactly like you can in *Top Spin 2*, as it turns out) and take them through amateur and mid-range competitions before challenging the stars of the professional tennis world. In addition to the competitive modes, there will be the return of the skill-honing mini-games that have characterised *Virtua Tennis* games of the past, playable both competitively and in single-player.

This is, we must remember, the first *Virtua Tennis* title to hit consoles for a very long while – since the Dreamcast, in fact. To make this console-specific debut a truly viable prospect, Sega will have to provide enough incentive to purchase. This cements the publisher's commitment to the next generation of videogame consoles although it could also possibly represent a decreased focus on arcades for the company, which many might find concerning. As a launch prospect for the PlayStation3, *Virtua Tennis 3* is solid – although extensive improvements to the artificial intelligence, player repertoire and depth will have to be made over and above the last console outing for number three to live up to its next-generation status.


Talent has not yet been confirmed for the title, but we've been promised some new additions.

"IMPROVEMENTS WILL HAVE TO BE MADE OVER AND ABOVE THE LAST OUTING IF THIS IS TO LIVE UP TO ITS NEXT-GEN STATUS"


eMag

THE OUTSIDER



The Outsider is a story of governmental corruption, so expect to be hit with nightsticks.

THE NEXT GENERATION FINALLY ARRIVES?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: TBA
DEVELOPER: Frontier
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

Take everything you thought you knew about games and destroy it, *The Outsider* is here to revolutionise the industry… Probably.

You can tell someone's lying by looking at their eyes. If their pupils flick to the left when they speak, chances are what they're saying is a fabrication. It's science, sort of, and whether you use the technique practically or not, it's still reassuring to know that you could.

That's the frustrating thing about judging a game with some far-flung release date. Press releases don't have eyes, screenshots have no body language, and yet new games are surrounded with a level of hyperbole that would leave a naïve individual with the distinct impression that the title of 'best game ever' changes hands week to week. With no physical signs to look out for, journalists are left with one tool in the search for critical honesty. It's called cynicism, and a healthy dose of it is required in order to cut through the crap.

The Outsider may not turn out to be a typical game, but it's a good example of unsubstantiated hype – information is thin on the ground, but the air is thick with (possibly) empty promises. Frontier claims that its game, "emphasises that gorgeous graphics are merely the starting point; they do not make a true 'next-generation' game." Manna from heaven, music to our jaded ears because, with a few notable exceptions, the recent Xbox 360 titles seem to have taken 'next generation' as short-hand for 'looks pretty'. From then on, though, things become a little murky.

Frontier continues, "The game radically enriches the player's experience by abandoning the traditional, prescriptive, mostly linear story of current-generation games, and replaces it by simulating character's motivations and aims [giving] the player genuine freedom to change the story outcomes in a way that hasn't been seen before." It's one hell of a premise, but how it will be achieved and what it will actually involve is left to the imagination – just those few tantalising sentences to whet the appetite.

Of course, every word of this could turn out to be true – let's hope it is, it'd be one hell of a game – but cynicism and good old-fashioned integrity rules out fawning over such bottomless claims. David Braben chairman of Frontier says, "We're at the stage that the film industry was at in 1930, where people had started to tire of effects-driven, 'car-on-a-train-track' films and wanted something more… A golden age of games is just around the corner, and I believe *The Outsider* is one of the first of these." Time will tell if he's right… and if he's not, hey, at least it has gorgeous graphics.

"RECENT XBOX 360 TITLES SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN 'NEXT GENERATION' AS SHORT-HAND FOR 'LOOKS PRETTY'"



You take control of a rogue CIA agent. We're guessing this is him. He has a beard, after all.


eMag

SHOWCASE

FOLLOWING E3, THIS BUMPER SHOWCASE BRINGS YOU ALL YOU NEED TO WATCH FOR

NEW NAUGHTY DOG GAME (WORKING TITLE)

JUNGLE FROLICS

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Naughty Dog
Genre: Action
Players: 1



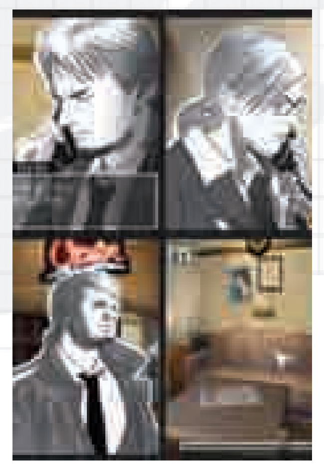
The Sony conference treated us to a reel of never-before-seen PlayStation3 games, the first of which was this untitled action-adventure from the creator of *Jak And Daxter*. The jungle ruins setting and all-action hero (who bears something of a resemblance to Nathan Fillion) remind us very much of *Tomb Raider*, and indeed the action seemed reminiscent of that series. The trailer showed a lot of nimble jumping about and thrilling gunplay. The main character is almost certainly a treasure hunter, although his attire doesn't exactly suggest a polished Indiana Jones-esque professional. We haven't even a title from which to draw clues about the game yet, but the teaser trailer looked very exciting indeed.

RELEASE: TBA

HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

IT'S A NOT-SO-MINI ADVENTURE

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Cing
Genre: Point-And-Click Adventure
Players: 1



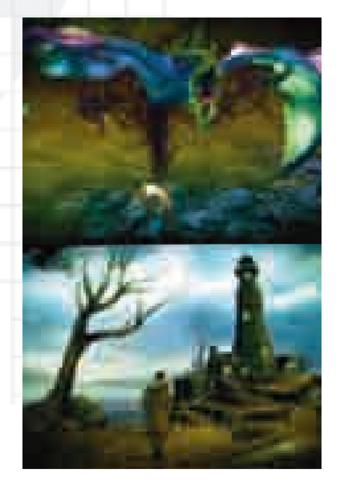
We've been aching for a new DS adventure since *Another Code* which captivated adventure-game lovers. So, we were delighted at the announcement of Nintendo and Cing's collaborative new game, *Hotel Dusk*. Following the story of Kyle Hyde, who is tracking a missing friend, this traditionally styled, mature title uses hand-drawn characters, animations and locations to make everything as believable as possible. The DS is held in the 'book' position pioneered (if that's the right word) by *Brain Training*, and it looks more substantial than *Another Code* which, although brilliant, was tragically short. Cing won't disappoint us. This is the next adventure game to watch out for.

RELEASE: Q4 '06

MONSTER KINGDOM

WHEN DID DIMENSION SWAPPING GET SO COMMON?

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action RPG
Players: TBA



It seems that this title will utilise the same sort of parallel dimension theme as *Dreamfall*. What we've seen so far features two different characters: a man who looks a lot like *Metal Gear Solid*'s Otakon, and a blue-skinned fantasy warrior (presumably the same character in different realities). We've also seen a variety of fantasy creatures and settings offset by scenes from a recognisable version of reality, so there'll seemingly be a balance between fantasy-themed and more realistic gameplay. Described as "the next generation of dark fantasy", the game was shown at the Sony conference, but although expected to appear on the show floor, it sadly didn't, leaving us guessing how the game would play.

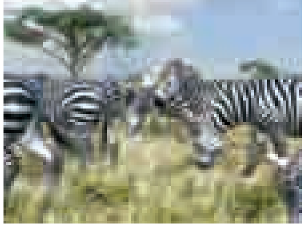
RELEASE: TBA

AFRIKA

WHERE THE RAINS COME SELDOM

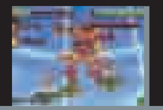
Format: PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Unknown
Players: TBA



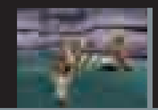


Now this is an enigma. Showing nothing more than exceptionally well-rendered animals wandering around a gorgeous African landscape (we saw rhinos, giraffes and other such exotic species), the trailer shown at E3 is pleasingly intriguing. We're guessing it's not going to be some variation on *Big Game Hunter* – although that would be very amusing – but we're not at all sure what it will be either. Perhaps an African adventure game, possibly survival, maybe even ecosystem management or animal tracking. We don't even know which of Sony's development studios is working on the game, but we have been assured that this is more than just an impressive tech demo for the PlayStation3…

RELEASE: TBA



DELAYED – Gitaroo Man Lives! [PSP] October
This PSP *Gitaroo Man* remake was only announced a few weeks ago, but already the date has slipped. Ah well.

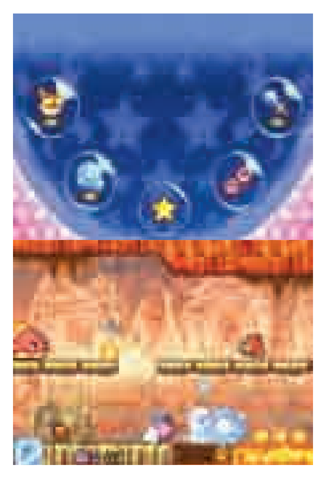


DELAYED – Phantasy Star Universe [360] February
PSU is now almost a year away, and a considerable number of months behind the PC and PlayStation2 releases in October.

KIRBY DS

A BRUSH WITH TRADITION

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform
Players: 1



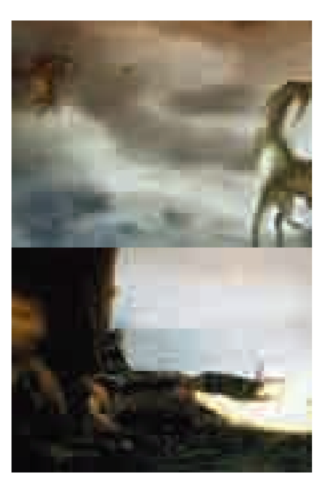
Unlike *Canvas Curse* (aka *Magical Paintbrush*), this new Kirby game for the DS is a traditional platformer thankfully lacking the obsession with the stylus from which so many DS games suffer. It plays like the old Game Boy instalments in the series, with plenty of jumping and enemy ingestion. Powers gained from enemies can be reserved on the bottom screen and used at any time, like the item storage in *Super Mario Bros 3*. Using the bottom screen, you can combine items to create new powers and abilities entirely for Nintendo's Mr Pink. Though it lacks the charm and innovation of *Canvas Curse*, *Kirby DS* is a welcome return to traditional platforming, and joins *Yoshi's Island* at the forefront of the DS's 2D renaissance.

RELEASE: TBA

LAIR

WE ALWAYS THOUGHT DRAGONS HAD DENS

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Factor 5
Genre: Action
Players: 1



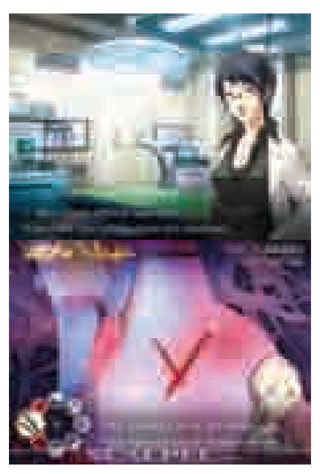
Revealed at the Tokyo Game Show last year, *Lair* was shown again during Sony's conference at E3. An exciting new game from Factor 5 (developer of the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* games), *Lair* is an aerial combat game with a difference: the pilots ride dragons instead of planes or spaceships. It seems that players will be fighting each other as well as wreaking general havoc on the landscape down below – the stunning trailer showed dragons swooping in on dense crowds and pilots leaping from dragon to dragon, skewering the fine beasts with a blade. The PS3 should be able to handle loads of dragons on screen at any one time, leaving the opportunity open for massive dragon wars.

RELEASE: TBA

TRAUMA CENTER: SECOND OPINION

DOCTOR, DOCTOR, GIMME THE NEWS

Format: Nintendo Wii
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Atlus
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



Unfortunately, we saw nearly nothing of this new *Trauma Center* at E3 – it won't be playable until this year's TGS, we're told. Still, what we did see was enough to whet our appetites. The game stars the same characters from the excellent DS game, including young superstar doctor Derek Stiles and attractive nurse partner Angie. The Wii controller will become the scalpel, syringe, forceps and other surgical implements from the DS game, and as some of the screenshots show dialogue such as "The disease is incurable!", it looks like *Second Opinion* will be just as charged and challenging as its DS predecessor. How the precision movements of a DS stylus will translate to a big screen, though, remains to be seen.

RELEASE: LATE 2006

DIDDY KONG RACING

DO WAH DIDDY!

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: UK
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-8



When Rare was originally bought by Microsoft, Nintendo devotees took solace in the fact that the famous British developer would continue to support the GBA. Unfortunately, every game Rare subsequently released for the handheld was rubbish, and Nintendo fans took solace in the fact that Microsoft has only managed to squeeze two mediocre games from Rare in the four years since the $377 million acquisition. Anyway, *Diddy Kong Racing* is very fondly remembered and was the debut stage for Rare stars Banjo the Bear and Conker the Squirrel, and the game is now coming to DS in a refurbished state. Please, Rare, don't put any redundant touch or microphone features in just for the sake of it.

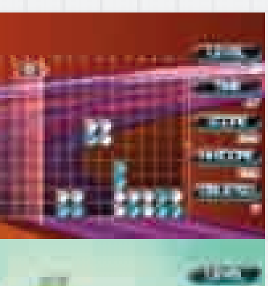
RELEASE: TBA

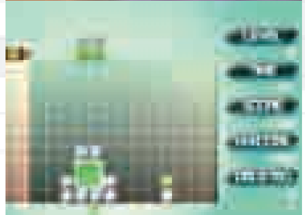
SHOWCASE

LUMINES LIVE!

ARE YOU A SWIFTLY FALLING BLOCK OF MANY COLOURS?

Format: Xbox Live Arcade
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Q Entertainment
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1-2





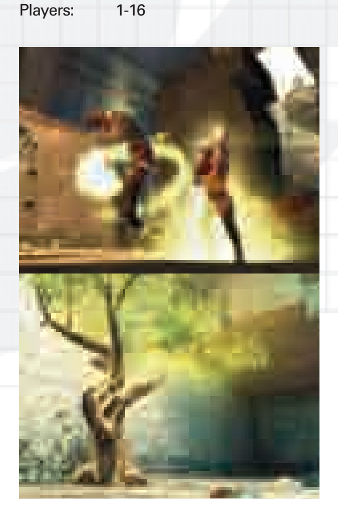
As announced at Microsoft's E3 press conference, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Lumines* is making the leap to home consoles via Xbox Live Arcade alongside such console classics as *Pac-Man, Contra* and *Dig Dug*. Gameplay-wise it's pretty much entirely identical to the PSP version, but the real difference here is the music. Microsoft has signed an agreement with Warner Music to provide new tunes and videos on demand as a backdrop to the puzzling (we saw a Madonna one), not entirely unlike Sony's new *SingStar* strategy. Presumably, new content will automatically stream through the game, because having to pay for extra tracks would be a little extortionate considering the fast-paced nature of the game.

RELEASE: Q3 '06

SHADOWRUN

RUN! RUN! RUN!

Format: Xbox 360, PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: FASA Studio
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Players: 1-16





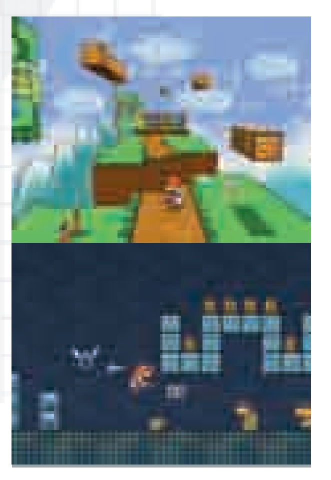
A surprise announcement from Microsoft, this new *Shadowrun* game is a cross-platform FPS based on the legendary RPG. Don't cry blasphemy just yet; it's looking quite good. Players will use both the magic and the advanced weaponry of the original game, incorporating a variety of special powers like hologram projection and teleportation to make this more than just a straight team-based multi-player FPS. The fact that this game comes from FASA Studio, creator of the excellent *Crimson Skies*, bodes well, and it's almost certain to be a high-quality combat game, but we can't help but be a little disappointed – it's hardly the *Shadowrun* sequel that fans have been waiting for all these years.

RELEASE: TBA

SUPER PAPER MARIO

IT'S A 2D RENAISSANCE

Format: GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Platform
Players: 1



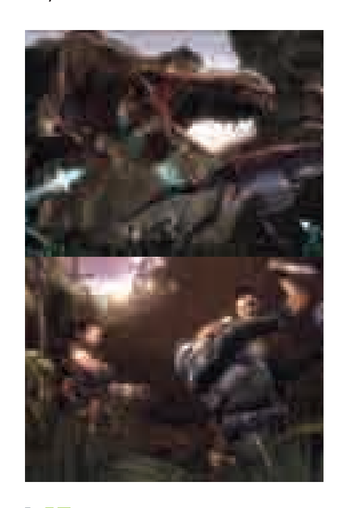
***Super Paper Mario* was a very pleasant surprise at E3.** It seems, thankfully, that Nintendo is not yet ready to put the poor, struggling GameCube entirely to rest. As the name suggests, this is a new *Paper Mario* game, but unlike the previous two it's a platformer. Large pixellated versions of Mario, Bowser and Peach sprites from the NES-era games make an appearance in the trailer and it seems that you'll be able to switch between playable characters, using Peach to float down from high jumps and Bowser to stomp through things, and so on. It retains the visual charm of *The Thousand Year Door*, but what we really want is another Mario RPG – we'd hate to see the series confined to platforming from now on.

RELEASE: Q4 '06

TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER

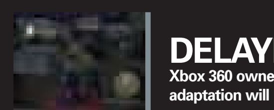
WHEN'S THIS GUY GOING TO DIE?

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: Buena Vista
Developer: Propaganda Games
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Players: 1-8



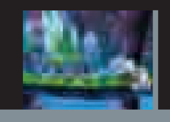
Wrenched from the cold dead hands of Acclaim just weeks after the publisher was liquidated, the *Turok* licence simply refuses to give up and die. Although the series hasn't done anything remotely noteworthy for videogames since the Nintendo 64 days, Propaganda Games' effort looks more promising than could reasonably have been expected. It still doesn't exactly fill us with confidence, though, because *Turok Evolution* was very shit indeed. Nevertheless, this latest *Turok* title will feature a balance of all-action and stealth gameplay and shooting T-Rexes in the throat with bows while hiding behind trees… which is really quite good, we suppose. No Cerebral Bore yet though.

RELEASE: TBA '07



DELAYED – The Godfather [360] September

Xbox 360 owners wishing to sample EA's almost-there *The Godfather* adaptation will have to wait a little longer.



DELAYED – Sonic Rivals [PSP] December

Sonic the Hedgehog has already made several Nintendo DS appearances, but PSP owners will now have to wait.

CHIBI-ROBO PARK PATROL

BEWARE OF THE BEARS

Format:	Nintendo DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Adventure
Players:	1



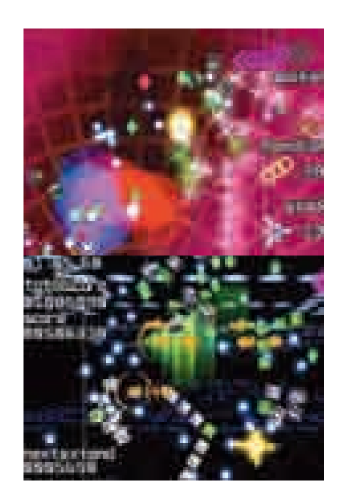
It's amazing how close some DS games are coming to looking like GameCube games. To be honest, we were expecting a deluge of N64 remakes – much like the Game Boy Advance's SNES renaissance – but it looks as if Nintendo's focus is upon bringing its newer franchises to the DS. Like *Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, *Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol* brings the same art style of the GameCube title to the DS, and much the same gameplay too. Put in charge of a huge and vibrant park, the helpful little thing must scoot about looking after flowers and dancing (bless) to bring dead ones back into bloom. The game is entirely adorable, and very well suited to the handheld – this is just the thing to cheer us up during lunchtimes.

RELEASE: TBA

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

THE OTHER E3

Format:	PSP
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Buena Vista
Developer:	Q Entertainment
Genre:	Shooter
Players:	1



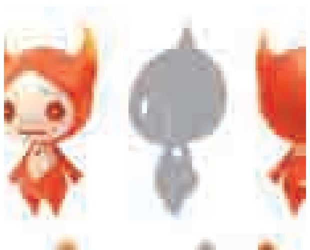
Lovely to play, impossible to explain, *Every Extend Extra* is another of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's games. (He created *Lumines* for those who haven't read the *Lumines Live!* preview.) Very much like *Fantavision* in concept but more like *Rez* in practice, you control a little detonator flying through tunnels, avoiding crystals that whizz past. Detonating while there are many crystals on screen leads to huge bonuses, and occasional hard-to-avoid boss characters will pop up as well. A frantic game, it's pace and complexity make it very addictive, and its look and sound is very much like *Lumines* – the music and surroundings change depending on how you're doing, as in both *Rez* and *Lumines*.

RELEASE: OCTOBER

ELEBITS

HIGH-ENERGY SNACKS

Format:	Nintendo Wii
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Konami
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Action
Players:	1





Set in a world without fossil fuels or electricity, *Elebits* is a bizarre blend of *Pikmin* and *Ape Escape*, in which you have to find and zap cute little critters that are the source of the world's energy. The precious little chaps have seemingly gone on strike, and so you must scour the world, looking for them, wandering through houses picking stuff up and shaking cookie jars with the Wii controller in order to find them and return them to their little workstations by zapping them in the face. It's a charming and addictive little game, if slightly sinister. We demand to know what happens to the furry wee things once captured. It's like the monkeys in *Ape Escape*. Where are they taken? What are they made to do?

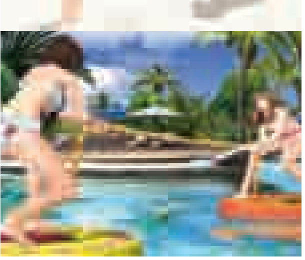
RELEASE: TBA '07

DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME 2

A NEW WAY TO ENJOY SPORTS?

Format:	Xbox 360
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Microsoft
Developer:	Tecmo
Genre:	Sports (apparently)
Players:	1-4





The title of this game is missing the words 'Beach' and 'Volleyball', possibly because *Dead Or Alive: Xtreme 2* is looking to expand upon the sporting talents of the first game's underclad *Dead Or Alive* ladies. This latest instalment will include various watersports, which will no doubt give Tecmo the chance to show off its lovely new water-on-breast effects, as well as a selection of new swimwear. Breasts will have their very own physics engine, too. Probably. Anyway, so far very little is known about the actual gameplay (if it turns out to be as distressingly shallow as the first game, we'll be annoyed if not exactly surprised), however, the trailer was enough to get fans, er, warmed up.

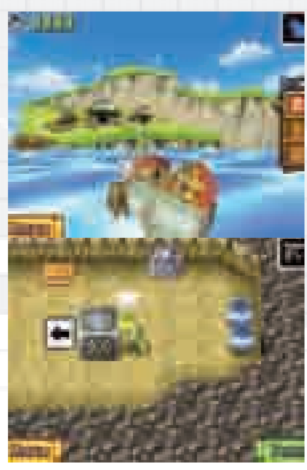
RELEASE: TBA '06

SHOWCASE

ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

TOUCHED US IN GOOD WAYS

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



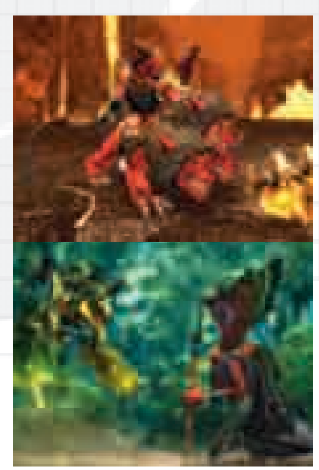
Announced at GDC, *Phantom Hourglass* is the first entirely new *Zelda* game in a long time. Set in the *Wind Waker* world and adopting the same artistic direction as its GameCube stablemate, this is fan heaven. During our hands-on with the game, we navigated an ocean by plotting a course on the map with the stylus and using gears and cannons to control our speed and combat on the gameplay screen. Once on dry land, the real revelations start – Link is controlled entirely with the stylus, moving smoothly toward whichever area you tap on screen. Combat is easy, the game's look and feel is entirely charming, and the control method works extraordinarily well. We can't wait, we really can't.

RELEASE: LATE '06

EYE OF JUDGEMENT

THE CARDS ARE ON THE TABLE

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony
Developer: In-House
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1-4



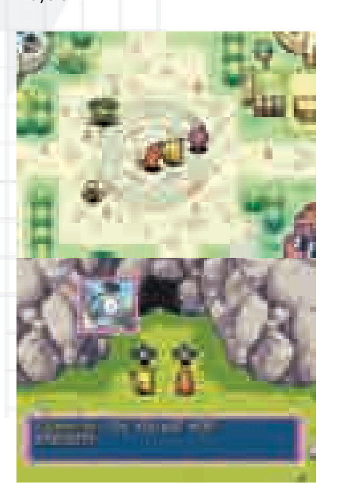
It's like a fanatical card game player's drug-induced hallucination. Using Sony-endorsed fantasy-themed playing cards (like *Magic: The Gathering*, or the *Pokémon* trading cards, although sadly it looks like neither of those will be supported), this new Sony gadget looks like a light-table can bring battles to life. The light-table itself is shown on the TV, and when you place cards on it, little 3D versions of the creatures on the cards spring up on the screen and do battle in real-time. Although little more than a tech demo at present, this was really very impressive indeed – the possibilities are very exciting, and we can easily see another collectable trading card phase sweeping across Japan and emptying parents' pockets.

RELEASE: TBA

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON

COME ON, BECOME POKÉMON

Format: Nintendo DS, GBA
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: 1



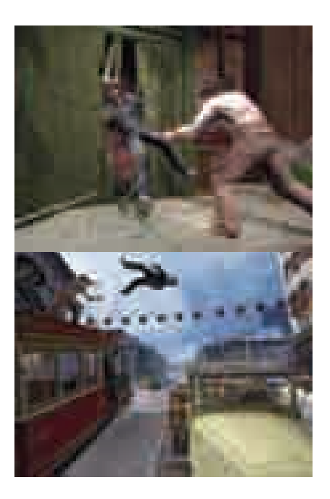
Given the sheer number of *Pokémon* games released since the series' debut ten years ago, it seems a little odd that Nintendo hasn't yet given us the opportunity to step into the non-existent shoes of the creatures yet. This game, though, first asks you a large number of distressingly perspicacious questions and then transforms you into an appropriate Pokémon for the duration of the game. There are two versions of the game, *Blue Rescue Team* on the DS and *Red Rescue Team* for the alive-and-kicking GBA, and in each the goal is to turn back into your true self by becoming the strongest Pokémon around. An interesting take on a now ageing concept, and one we'll be keeping an eye on.

RELEASE: SEPTEMBER

INDIANA JONES 2007 (WORKING TITLE)

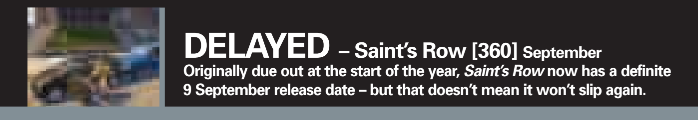
BE CAREFUL, INDY

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action-Adventure
Players: 1

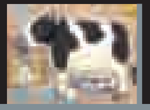


Although details of the plot and gameplay are scarce, LucasArts was keen to show off the technology behind this Indiana Jones title at E3. The game will utilise unique next-gen AI technology that makes Indiana and his enemies react very realistically to their environment, grabbing onto ledges to save themselves or struggling across dodgy bridges, reacting to the swaying and rolling of the wood underneath them. None of the characters' movement is pre-scripted – if you knock an enemy off the top of a truck or cliff, he'll intelligently try to save himself by grabbing onto whatever he can. It's expected that more will be released about the setting and plot of the game closer to the end of the year.

RELEASE: TBA '07



DELAYED – Saint's Row [360] September
Originally due out at the start of the year, *Saint's Row* now has a definite 9 September release date – but that doesn't mean it won't slip again.

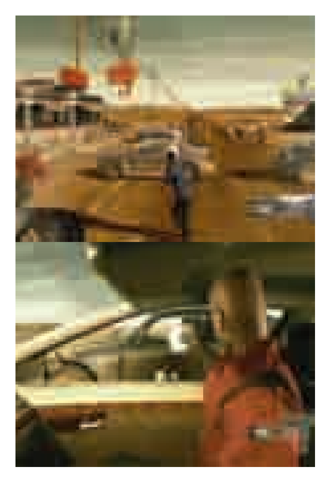


DELAYED – Harvest Moon: Magical Melody [GC] September
It's been out in the states for ages, but at this rate the best *Harvest Moon* game yet might not even make it over here.

EIGHT DAYS

A WEEK AND A DAY OF ALL-OUT ACTION

Format:	PlayStation3
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	Sony
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Action
Players:	TBA



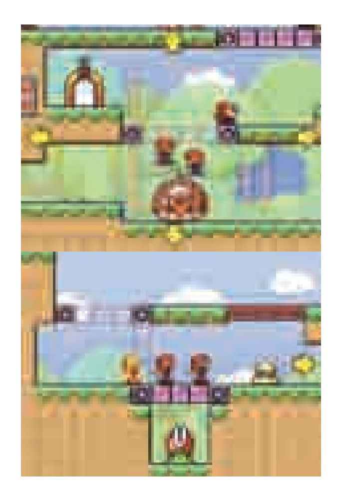
The most incredible thing about the version of *Eight Days* we saw was the animation and character movement – it actually looks like a movie. We saw both in-game and CGI footage and they pretty much match each other in terms of visual impressiveness. This looks to be a third-person shooter, and the trailer showed both car shootouts and on-foot action, the latter of which was easily the most impressive. Characters actually look like they are running for their lives to get behind cover, rather than the generic running animations we're used to, and they trip, stumble and leap over obstacles like an action hero rather than a collection of polygons. Like *Assassin's Creed*, this game looks palpably alive.

RELEASE: TBA

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS

MARIOS! MARIOS! EVERYWHERE

Format:	Nintendo DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Platform
Players:	1



This, as players of the first *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* game will know, is rather like 'Mario Lemmings', which we're sure you'll agree is an awesome idea. Enraged at a woman for buying a little Mario toy instead of a little DK toy, Donkey Kong kidnaps the poor unfortunate lady, and Mario sends hundreds of mini versions of himself to her rescue. The stylus is used to order the little Marios to move around, use items, lift things and otherwise interact with their environment – tapping makes them jump. You can also scroll the screen around each level, giving you a good idea of what's going on. Although conceptually similar to its predecessor, the stylus control gives it enough unique flavour to make this worthwhile.

RELEASE: 25 SEPTEMBER

STAR FOX DS

FOXY FIX

Format:	Nintendo DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Flight Combat
Players:	1-8



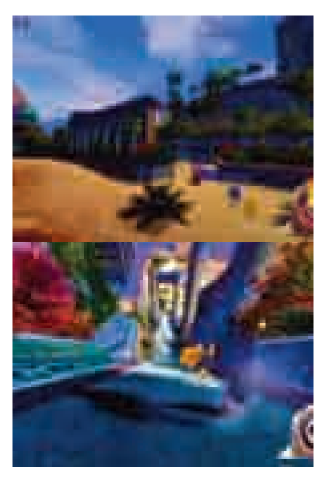
We weren't entirely sure about this at first, to be honest. Although spiritually a remake of *Lylat Wars, Star Fox DS* allows players to take up a combat role as well, plotting a course and then engaging in combat in a turn-based system. That didn't exactly sound like the swooping gloriousness of *Lylat Wars'* fantastic on-rails levels to us, but playing the game at E3 has made us a little happier – it plays just like the *Star Fox* games of old, dispelling our memories of the recent lacklustre *Star Fox Adventures* and *Star Fox: Assault*. Eight-player competitive play is what we're really looking forward to, though, as happy recollections of dog fighting in *Lylat Wars* are still very much alive in our minds.

RELEASE: AUGUST

SONIC WILD FIRE (WORKING TITLE)

FLAMING HEDGEHOG

Format:	Nintendo Wii
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sonic Team
Genre:	Action
Players:	1



The focus of the Nintendo Wii and its games is (quite rightly) on gameplay, and so a lot of the early builds on display at E3 had obviously not had very much time lavished upon their aesthetics as developers struggled to get the gameplay in place before the event. *Sonic Wild Fire*, on the other hand, was an exception. Deliciously fast, pleasingly retro and really rather promising, this little title is a return to the series' roots. Despite its steering-based control method this feels like a classic *Sonic* game, and the look and feel of the levels are much more authentic than what we've seen of the other *Sonic* title in production – it is a quite different game. Shame it's not a Nintendo Wii launch prospect…

RELEASE: TBA '07





It’s a ‘Minnie’ adventure **Mickey Mouse: Castle Of Illusion, SMS [Sega] 1990**



"TODAY YOU WILL START TO SEE, BUT TOMORROW YOU WILL START TO FEEL"

REGGIE FILS-AIME, PRESIDENT AND COO NINTENDO OF AMERICA

Just Wii™

A brave machine forging its own path, Nintendo has aimed to separate the Wii from the competition. But now that it's out from behind the curtain, how has it fared?

It's impressive how quickly a single word can cause a stir throughout the entire industry, but Nintendo reminded us of this speed the day it revealed the new name for it's next-generation machine – Wii.

Phones rang and forums blazed with the title, but aiding the news in its swift travel was a wave of sniggers. The name has been explained to us time and time again: "'Wii' sounds like 'we,' which emphasises that this console is for everyone. Wii can easily be remembered by people around the world, no matter what language they speak. No confusion. No need to abbreviate. Just Wii." But however splendorous this sounds, setting the giggles to rest was going to be no easy task. Although not necessarily funny in a genuine sense, the new title lends itself easily to mockery – something that most in the industry couldn't help but take advantage of for a while.

Listen Up

Also revealed at E3 was a new feature for the already revolutionary Wii controller. It was confirmed that the controller will contain a small speaker that works in harmony with your existing set up allowing you to hear things in your hand. A good example of this is Link's bow in *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. When an arrow is fired you'll hear the 'twang' in the controller speaker and then be able to follow the sound it makes as it travels to its target. The final noise as the arrow hits will come from your TV. This is a simple example, but we're sure Nintendo will find plenty of other ways to exploit this feature.

"Wii WILL TAKE WHAT IS FAMILIAR, AND REINVENT IT. Wii WILL GIVE MORE FUN FOR LESS MONEY"

REGGIE FILS-AIMÉ, PRESIDENT AND COO NINTENDO OF AMERICA

"Thanks to all those who wrote nice things about the name," Nintendo's ever-charismatic Reggie Fils-Aimé smirked as he opened the company's E3 Media Conference – he then added, "both of you," just as we realised the predictability of the gag and were cringing in anticipation. Nintendo is far from foolish. It knows. When sniping at the Nintendo's newest console name, it almost feels as if people are playing into its hands. It's become increasingly obvious that these digs aren't playground-style jibes that are performed behind someone's back, but rather something that Nintendo was counting on. "I want you all to say it with me," Miyamoto smiled when his turn to speak arrived. "Weeeeeeee." Sure people laughed. It was funny. But it had turned into laughing with rather than at. Another point to Nintendo.

As Reggie so eloquently put it as we sat waiting for the various treats to be revealed, "If all you want is next gen, you're in the wrong place". It's a simple message that confirms Nintendo's stance on the competition – it doesn't think there is any. Not in the videogames industry at least. "I don't really look at the competition as being between us and other members of the games industry." Miyamoto tells us. "I see us competing with the other forms of entertainment. If we can compete with these other forms and grab the attention of people who aren't currently playing videogames, then we're going to expand the audience and that will be better for the industry as a whole. That's my quest."

Maybe it's foolish to attempt to ignore Sony and Microsoft in this way, but it has to be said that this time, with its competitors focusing on elements such as HD and Blu-Ray technologies, it may be a case of not being able to compete rather than not going to. Then again, from what's been said, not actually wishing to compete is probably closer to the mark – but does Nintendo really need to be bothered?

IT'S NO SECRET THAT, although flourishing in Japan, Nintendo hasn't been doing too well throughout the western world. A meagre line-up of titles for the GameCube has seen the machine shunned by many, with only the hardest of fans



bothering to venture away from the few first-party masterpieces that have been on offer – but the fans are certainly still there.

We sat through all of Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo's E3 media briefings and it's not difficult to see exactly where the majority of excitement lies. Possibly it was down to the overwhelming hype that PlayStation3 had received on the road to E3 – hype that it simply couldn't deliver on, or maybe it was due to the 'surprise' *Halo 3* trailer holding very little actual surprise, but most likely it was down to the showmanship displayed by Nintendo. There are few who can say that Miyamoto donning conductors' attire and then using the Wii controller to perform the well-known *Legend Of Zelda* theme isn't a fine introduction to any event. If you disagree, you're simply wrong. The mood was set and, from that point on, Nintendo had the crowd in the palm of its hand.

Already known titles such as Ubisoft's *Red Steel* took a back seat to the wealth of first-party titles that were revealed and, with each big name that was announced, enthusiasm was shown. Not just by the usually-over-the-top US journalists either. Among the echoes of continuous hi-fives and 'oh yeahs', the rest of the world was equally impressed – it's amazing the emotion that the mention of a big name and a movie snippet can invoke without any clues of when, where or – most importantly when the new controller is considered – how?

"What we really want to do this time around is take all of you who have been playing games for a long time and give you a new and exciting way of playing videogames," Miyamoto continues. "At the same time we want to go back and get all the people who used to play our games years ago who've found that games have become too difficult to navigate and play."

This is what Nintendo has been promising from the very beginning, but it has to be said that a fair few eyebrows were raised when Sony showed its new controller's abilities and it seemed to mimic the Wii at a basic level. For a long while we've had Nintendo informing us of how it plans to change the way we play games and, although this is still likely to be the truest outcome, to have Sony make a last-minute dash toward innovation has hinted at desperation – especially when the new control techniques that were shown seemed patched on and, at this early stage at least, quite poorly realised. Could Sony be attempting to rain a little on Nintendo's parade? Maybe. But there's very little chance of any success.

For all the speculation there's been over the practicality of Nintendo's new control

system, there's now no doubt at all that it works extremely well when used for the purposes intended, as there are plenty of people – including us, of course – that have had a fair amount of hands-on time with the machine. Easy access, family fun and the aforementioned 'change to the way we play games' have all been achieved, but it could be the hardcore player who loses out…

"YOU'VE BEEN USED to playing games with your hands together, so it may take a little bit to re-program your brain," Miyamoto revealed to us. "People that have never played before, they will pick the controller up and be in the game faster than a lot of you are. We've hit the reset button on play control and now all you guys are at the same level as those who've never played before."

Although this sounds fair and is the ultimate step in the company's 'we're going to appeal to everybody' approach, we can't help but feel that anyone wishing to play for longer than an hour or so – exactly what any committed gamer is going to want to do – will struggle a little. Games such as *Red Steel* are fairly involved and, with shooting, swordplay, parries and even simple tasks such as opening doors requiring a fair amount of arm movement, tiredness could well begin to set in before many are ready to end play. So sure, a short game of tennis with a few friends may be perfect fodder for the machine, but heftier titles such as *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* and *Zelda: Twilight Princess* may prove a little more difficult to digest if we are indeed forced into playing in bite-size chunks. Though, that said, it's been made very clear that not every game will make use of the Wii control system…

One of Nintendo's biggest announcements has been that of *Super Smash Bros Brawl* – a game that is set to shun the Wii controller and rather require a GameCube pad to play. Considering the nature of the series, this is probably a good idea. Taking place in the famous Kodak Theatre during E3, Miyamoto appeared once again with news of the game. It was strange that this particular announcement had been held back as Nintendo had already announced plenty of the Wii line-up, but here we were, the lucky 'few', in front of a smiling Miyamoto. Once again,

Stay Connected

The Wii will have a feature called Wii Connect 24 which will allow you to leave the console online all the time even when you have the machine powered down. We've been told that this feature will use approximately the same amount of energy as a small light bulb, and not only will this be useful for large downloads, it also means that should games such as *Animal Crossing* start appearing, people will be able to come and visit your village while you're not there. Actually, that's quite a worrying thought. They could plant turnips everywhere and ruin our garden.

"TODAY THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO PLAY AND PEOPLE WHO DON'T PLAY. Wii WILL HELP DESTROY THAT WALL"

SATORU IWATA, NINTENDO PRESIDENT



Play Time

We all know that some of the finest games ever have featured on Nintendo consoles, and that the Virtual Console will allow the Wii to have access to older titles – but there's probably a lot more on offer than you realise. The Wii will have downloadable access to 20 years of fan-favourite titles originally released for N64, SNES and NES. The Virtual Console will also feature a 'best of' selection from Sega Genesis titles and games from the TurboGrafx console. My word, we're going to have a lot of games to play.

Nintendo was attempting to make us part of something special. It's what it does best and this feeling is what drives most of the fans – the feeling that the games are being made for them…

"THE NAME OF the game is still games," Reggie told us at the start, and it's clear that this is still the case when *Super Smash Bros* creator Masahiro Sakurai openly quizzed the room as to which characters they'd like to see appear in *Super Smash Bros Brawl* other than the new ones already announced? Of course, with the room being full of keen-minded journalist-types… Every arm in the room shoots into the air with the hope of being the arm indirectly attached to the mouth that gets to say the words 'Master Chief'. Someone gets chosen and something gets said, we don't hear what, but the fact that most of the arms drop to their original positions suggests that the obvious reply was given – we'll be faster next time. Still, they are all laughing.

A panel comprised of some of the most influential faces Nintendo has known is laughing at Master Chief. Not in a malicious way, of course, but in a confident way. A way that suggests that they know they have something special and that those who have stood by Nintendo over the last few years can look forward to something that bit different from the norm – something that, although armed with a mildly silly name, will allow you to be proud of Nintendo. What's more, you'll be able to look forward to sharing it with your friends, mother and little sister.

Despite the company being relatively open with regards to the software line-up and launch titles for the machine, an actual release date and price point have not been revealed with Reggie merely saying that, "Wii will take what is familiar, and reinvent it. Wii will give more fun for less money". This focus on accessible fun is what this particular machine is all about, and a quick glance around the faces on these pages – the faces Nintendo is using in all aspects of its promotion – and you're force-fed this fun. Those people are essentially made of glee. Read their faces and you'll be tempted to believe that playing Wii is the most fun you can have.

Okay, it may not be true, and our sceptical nature certainly refuses to allow us to believe that the fierce nudges seen on trailers and the gaping smiles shown in images will actually be on show when the Wii arrives, but it's a pretty effective campaign, and when it comes to the name, our hands are up. We admit it. We laughed. Though now, we do get the feeling that Nintendo could possibly end up chuckling the loudest. We'll find out for sure later in the year…



Wii™ Round-Up

A whole host of titles will be arriving for the Wii, and each is likely to test your arms in a different way. They may not all be available at launch, but we're sure you won't have too long to wait...

METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

Playing *Metroid Prime 3* was a rather strange experience. It looks, feels and is designed exactly like the other two *Metroid Prime* titles, but the fundamental difference in control made it feel like a totally different game. Using the nunchuck to move, and the remote to fire, it took a while before playing *Corruption* felt natural, but as the demo was a good 15 minutes long we had time to adjust to pointing and shooting at the screen. Samus could also use her grapple hook via a flick of the nunchuck – an essential technique for doors, switches and shielded enemies. The demo culminated in a fantastic falling battle with the infamous Ridley, which brought back memories of the series' great moments – despite the huge change in control, this retains that *Metroid* feel.

EXCITE TRUCK

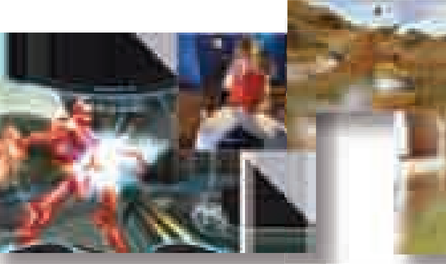
Well, it's hardly *ExciteBike*, but it's a start. Oddly enough, *Excite Truck* feels like *ExciteBike* – it's all about jumps and landings. Tilting the controller back and forth keeps your vehicle in time with the terrain, which changes underneath you as you drive. The actual driving itself is surprisingly intuitive, requiring the player to hold the Wii controller sideways as you would a steering wheel. Initially, and indeed throughout most of our time with *Excite Truck*, we ended up veering off in all sorts of wild and crazy directions. Because the game is both extremely fast and very powerslide-heavy, the jumps can make things especially difficult, but it was still good fun, and once you get used to the controller we can see this being a very skilled affair as well.

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

First off, you don't flick the remote upward to jump. Yes, we were disappointed too. The buttons on the remote and the nunchuck controlled Mario in the E3 demo; the motion sensitivity only came into play when attacking. Shaking either remote makes Mario spin around with his arms outstretched, and doing so while jumping gives you a little extra boost. Pointing at objects and pressing B lets you interact with them, and the trigger on the nunchuck is used to duck. We don't think the demo was that indicative of the finished game – jumping from planet to planet, defeating enemies or knocking coconuts around felt more like a mini-game – but the control was intuitive, making us more confident about performing enthusiastic Mario acrobatics in the finished game.

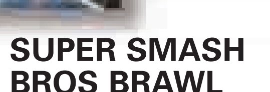
LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

This was the only game to show off the full functionality of the Wii controllers, including the speaker on the remote. You can hear yourself draw back the string of a bow, you can then hear the arrow travel from your hand to the TV – we can't convey exactly how exciting this was, but it really made you feel like part of the game. The very physical combat – stabbing and spinning the nunchuck is integral to the fighting – was exhilarating too. And as *Twilight Princess* is pretty much finished, it was easily the most exciting indication of what the Wii can really bring to gaming. Where the other games on show were basically bits of concept gameplay, this was a full, polished, visually lovely product, and the Wii functionality has been implemented without a hitch.









WII SPORTS

A prominent title at the Nintendo conference, *Wii Sports* so far comprises of tennis, golf and baseball, as well as the 'airplane' demo that many had hoped would be a new *Pilotwings*. The notable thing about *Wii Sports* is that everyone on the show floor who played it had a huge grin on their face. At the conference itself even Iwata was grinning like an idiot playing with Reggie Fils-Aimé, Miyamoto (who always wears a scary smile) and a member of the audience. Tennis worked really well – tossing the ball up in order to serve was especially satisfying. Airplane was the only part of the compilation that suffered control problems, but that didn't stop us (and apparently everyone else on the show floor) grinning with glee at the sheer novelty of it all.

WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

Now, this is pretty much exactly what we envisioned when the Wii controller was announced. *WarioWare* features an almost unlimited selection of characteristically mad mini-games which make you do everything from chop things up to sweep things aside to flail about like a madman. Before each mini-game, a little illustration of how to hold the controller appears (the 'handlebar', the 'umbrella', the 'Mohawk' and the 'finger food' positions being particularly amusingly examples), and pretty much every new game makes you laugh (or makes anyone watching you laugh at how ridiculous you look). Some fairly extravagant performance art was required from us even in the E3 demo; the possibilities are endless for multi-player embarrassments.

PROJECT H.A.M.M.E.R.

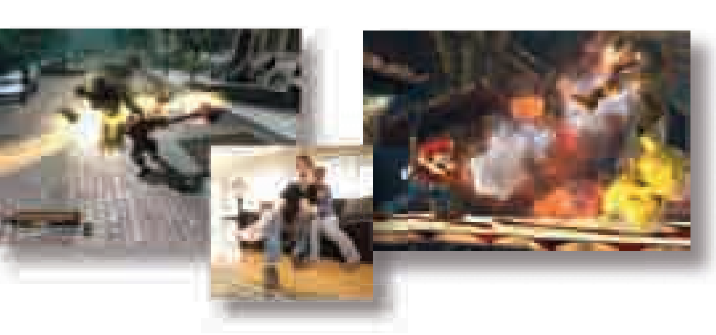
Project H.A.M.M.E.R. was very therapeutic. You'd have thought that it would require violent hammer-wielding gestures, but in fact it's little more than tapping A to sweep through the enemy hordes. Of course, you can swing the controller around and charge it up by holding it above your head if you so wish, but there's no need for continuous physical effort. Stylistically the game is pleasingly futuristic, featuring a heavily armoured main character and hordes of robots spewed from destructible generators. The demo ended with the entrance of a boss with a really, really massive cannon, but most unfortunately we didn't get to fight it. *H.A.M.M.E.R.* had probably the most simplistic concept of the Wii games on show, but like the rest of them, it was enjoyably visceral.

SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

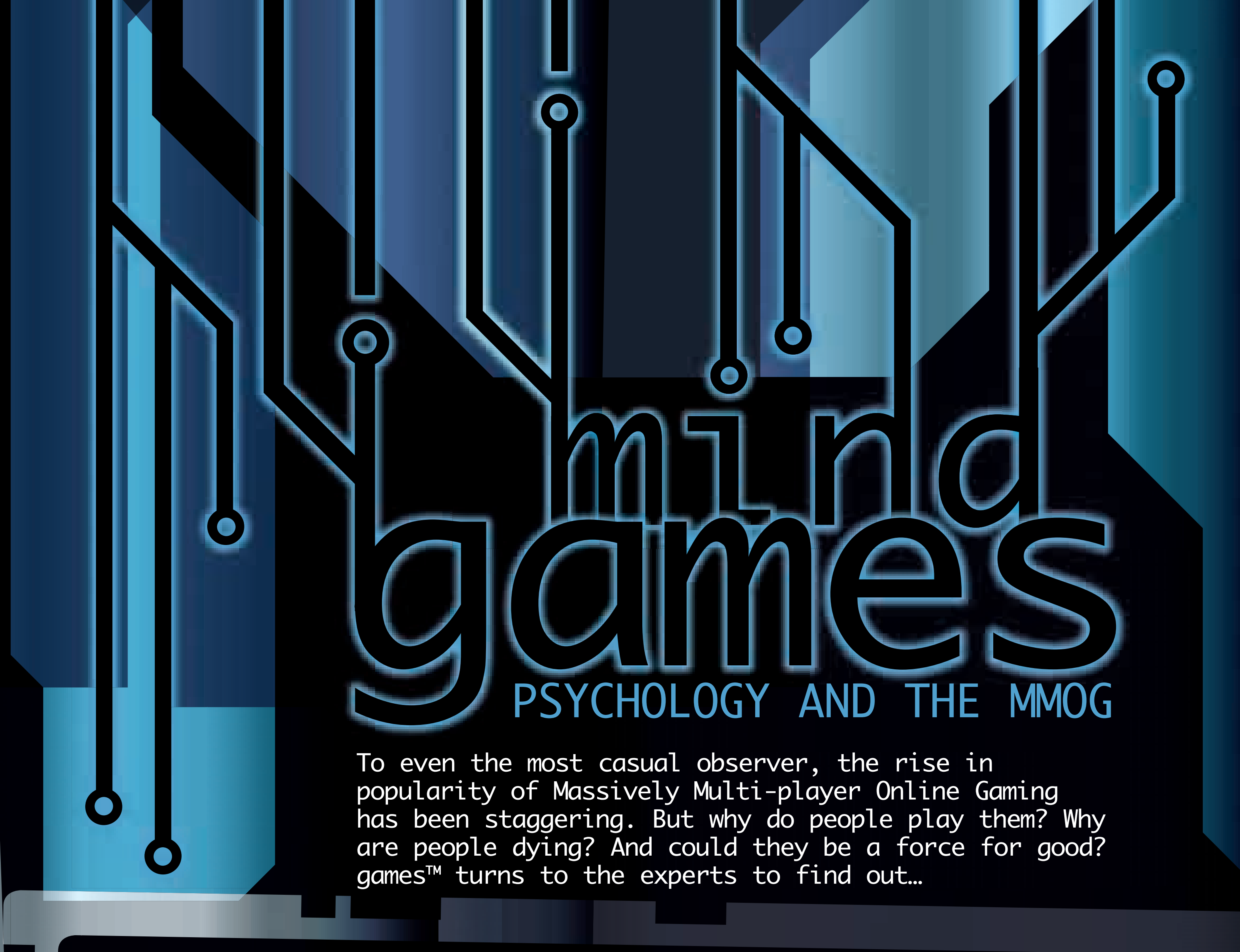
A surprise announcement: *Super Smash Bros Brawl* is the only game that will use the more traditional 'alternative' Wii controller – the GameCube pad. Konami's Solid Snake joins the typical Nintendo cast of fighters, and new additions Wario, Pit from Kid Icarus, Metaknight and Zero Suit Samus all made an appearance in the quite sumptuous trailer. Compared with *Smash Bros Melee*, *Brawl* looks very impressive; the detail on the characters is much improved, especially on Link, who takes his *Twilight Princess* guise. Presumably the game will feature some Wii controller functionality as well, but any firm details of the game so far are scarce. We do know, however, that it won't be out until 2007 – a shame, as *Smash Bros Melee* was a great launch title for the GameCube.











mind games

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE MMOG

To even the most casual observer, the rise in popularity of Massively Multi-player Online Gaming has been staggering. But why do people play them? Why are people dying? And could they be a force for good? games™ turns to the experts to find out…

"We come to see ourselves differently as we catch sight of our reflection in the mirror of the machine" – SHERRY TURKLE

For a long time wider society, helped in no small part by conservative media, nurtured the idea that serious gaming virtually necessitated a hermitic outlook toward life. The equivalent of claiming that everyone who reads books wears glasses, it's an erroneous and patronising assumption often made by people who would happily spend a sunny afternoon in front of the television. But there has been a change in videogames of late. The seemingly irresistible rise of the Massively Multi-player Online Game (MMOG), and the unparalleled levels of immersion they offer, has forced even the staunchest defenders of the medium to reassess their views.

Stories of broken marriages, ruined careers, and even deaths have become more and more frequent. Gamers complain of suffering withdrawal symptoms while societies and forums for addicts and "*EverQuest* widows" have become a regular feature of the Internet landscape. Far from being the creation of an ignorant media, claims of MMOG abuse have, perhaps for the first time, forced prominent thinkers to accept that the perceived dangers of gaming, which always seemed so farcical in the past, now have an unnerving ring of truth to them. As an idea, addiction to videogames has always been dismissed as no more of a problem than an addiction to golf or chess, but the nature of a product like *Second Life* – a completely open-ended facsimile of the real world, entirely populated by real people and with no constructed gaming elements – demands a radical rethink of what we mean by the term 'videogame'.

UTOPIA?

Nicholas Yee is the founder of The Daedalus Project, an Internet-based survey that has documented the habits of more than 35,000 MMOG users – the largest of its kind. Yee believes that for us to truly understand the power of MMOGs we must first elevate their status: "Framing [MMOGs] as 'videogames' distracts us from seeing the complexity and variety of things that can occur in these spaces. People fall in love… Some make their living in these worlds. Others learn important leadership skills they can use in real life. These are not just games."

Ironically, gamers themselves are just as quick to equate MMOGs with regular videogames, yet it is this denial of any extra significance that allows an atmosphere of distrust to grow. Historically, the potential for good of numerous emerging forms of communication has been hampered by irrational suspicion. Blaming technology for the rash, self-destructive actions of a few individuals is a classic response to the shock of the new.

"I think our society has the tendency to blame new technologies for old problems," Yee says. "We have always known that people who are depressed do things that are self-destructive, but whether we create a new psychological disorder – online gaming addiction – or recognise the problem for what it is – depression – is very much a social decision tied to the general paranoia these days with regards to the Internet and videogames."

"It is true that many players suffer negative consequences from playing MMOGs, but on the other hand there's an assumption that life is good for everyone. We presume that being in these online worlds is deviant, but if societal structures consistently produce misery, it's not clear why it isn't the real world that is deviant."

This view is reflected in Yee's findings which suggest that the heaviest users of MMOGs suffer from poor self-image. For those who are unhappy, ▷



socially awkward or see themselves as unattractive, these online worlds can provide a valuable tool for self-exploration and reinvention. "MMOGs may be seductive because they relieve common psychological stresses," Yee states. "Players with low self-esteem gain a tangible sense of power in these environments. Players who feel they are undervalued or have no control in the real world can take on valuable or instrumental roles."

Problems of self-image are especially prevalent in adolescents, and society's concerns over online gaming have centred on the possible effect that prolonged exposure to virtual worlds may have on such susceptible personalities. While it's undeniable that the teenage years see a person at their most impressionable, Yee maintains that MMOGs can be a gateway to the discovery of identity rather than the loss of it. "Dangers of teenagers losing hold of their real identities is ironic in that everyone shifts between multiple roles in real life. In fact, maturity is all about the accumulation and balance of roles and, more importantly, understanding life from different perspectives. Where else can a teenager lead a group of players who are most likely older than him?"

As the economies and societal structures that occur within MMOGs become more complex, the skills needed to succeed in the game, and the roles a player can occupy, become more relevant to the real world. The fantastical nature of titles like *EverQuest* and *World Of Warcraft* does little to detract from this, and actually allows participants to experience situations and behaviours that they would not normally be exposed to.

"The frequency and diversity of ways that courage, honour and malice can occur in these environments is far greater than real life typically presents them," Yee says. "These games encourage people to form trusting bonds with each other by repeatedly placing players in spontaneous and stressful crises that require them to work together in order to survive."

This negates the commonly held belief that friendships forged in MMOGs are worth less than those forged in the real world. The statistics show that a significant number of users view their online friends as comparable or superior to those in their actual lives, and the anonymity that the MMOG affords has allowed players to discuss and work through problems they may otherwise have felt incapable of dealing with.

While this substituting of actual reality for virtual reality, actual relationships for virtual relationships, has been the subject of much of the vitriol aimed at online games, Yee's research has shown that couples and families who play together tend to emerge better off. "Parents who play with their children often talk about how the online world becomes an important window in the identities and lives of their children, which they seldom have access to in real life. The MMOG environment allows these players to redefine the boundaries of their real-life roles in ways that enhance their relationships."

The main problem for Yee is that outside of the academic arena, coverage of MMOGs is extremely one-sided. Newspapers tend to demonise them while game journalists often marginalise their importance to avoid provocative debate. The cumulative result of these diverse approaches is that the possible benefits, and attendant problems, of MMOGs are going unexplored. Yee sees potential for using online worlds in education, job recruitment, personality assessment, therapy; but these are likely to remain potential uses until the wider world starts taking the phenomenon seriously.

"I don't agree with the splitting of 'real' and 'virtual' worlds," Yee claims. "If people are making real friends, real money and learning real skills in these virtual environments then

Case Study: The Child

On 24 May 2005, in Incheon, South Korea, a married couple in their mid-twenties left their home at 4pm to play *World Of Warcraft* at their local cyber café. Expecting only to be a couple of hours, the couple left their four month-old daughter safely locked up inside. Losing track of time, the couple played until 9pm. When they arrived home they found their daughter dead. She had rolled onto her stomach and suffocated. Far more than the gamer themself dying, this is emblematic of a more worrying trait – normal people shirking the responsibilities of real life for those in the world on screen.

The police discovered that the couple played *World Of Warcraft* at every available opportunity. They stated: "It's unfortunate because the tragedy could have been averted if the couple had just left the daughter with [their] mother-in-law, who lived upstairs. When you consider the situation, they were responsible for their daughter's death." Despite the accidental nature of the death the couple were charged with manslaughter. "We were thinking of playing for just an hour or two," the couple claimed, "but that day the game took longer."

the insistence of a 'here' versus 'there' is disingenuous. As new forms of communication such as telephone or email become pervasive, they are always viewed as intrinsic parts of society. They aren't viewed as separate places. Dangerous immersion becomes the norm."

DYSTOPIA?

That MMOGs have positive uses is beyond reasonable doubt, but despite the obvious bias the popular media shows toward the negative, the games industry has also long been guilty of ignoring its own shortcomings. Simply put, if MMOGs have the power to positively influence the lives and personalities of some, it logically follows that they are having a negative effect on others. The stories that reach us through the press are merely the worst-case scenarios, and it must be assumed that there are far more people who have been influenced in less newsworthy – though no less serious – ways.

Sherry Turkle, the professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, has been one of the pre-eminent thinkers on the subject since MUDs first made an appearance. Turkle is vociferous about MMOGs as a force for good, though more so than Yee she is still alive to the way they can be abused.

"Which would you rather see," she asks, "a Disneyland robot crocodile or a real crocodile? The Disney version rolls its eyes, moves from side to side, and disappears and rises again. It is designed to control our attention at all times. None of these qualities is necessarily visible at a zoo, where real crocodiles tend to spend most of their time sleeping. [The Disney crocodile] might be fun, but in its uniformity and lack of risk it is hard to imagine its marking a transition into adulthood."

For Turkle, the Disney crocodile is the reality presented by MMOGs – distracting, immersive, at times useful but of far less relevance than real experiences. Yee posits that the online world may be a better place for some as it is free from the harsh realities of life. This view, however, does not accept that it is necessary to experience suffering, discomfort and tragedy as rites of passage. When people say 'what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger', this is precisely what they mean.

"When we get our MMOG persona to emote something and observe the effect," Turkle suggests, "do we gain a better understanding of our real emotions, which can't be switched on and off so easily, and which we may not be able to describe? Or is the 'emote' command and all that it stands for a reflection of what Frederic Jameson has called, 'the flattening of post-modern life'? One's fear is, of course, that in the culture of simulation a word like authenticity can no longer apply."

Despite discovering that men control half of all of the female characters online, Yee sees little difference between relationships in the real world and those online. Turkle acknowledges that in a world where you can control every facet of your appearance, where body language and other uncontrollable reactions cannot be seen, and where every utterance can be meticulously contrived and constructed, it is difficult to confidently say that you really know anyone.

One of Turkle's former patients admitted that he had tentatively embarked on an online affair. Initially seeing it as just a bit of fun, he was taken by surprise at how much it had started to affect him – to the point where he was seriously considering leaving his wife. After a long absence the man came to Turkle again, this time looking pale and haunted. Assuming that his wife had left him, Turkle asked what was wrong. After a year-long affair, and the near-breakdown of his marriage, the man had discovered that his 'girlfriend' was actually an 86 year-old man in a Florida retirement home. The event had a severe impact on the man's emotional state and self-esteem, and is an extreme but relevant example of the facets of communication that are lost in this 'culture of simulation'.

That people are so willing to retreat into this virtual reality should come as little surprise. Communication technology has effectively made the world smaller, but it has also deprived us of the

FINDINGS FROM THE DAEDALUS PROJECT

- **The average age of respondents was 26.57**
- Approximately 25 per cent of users are teenagers
- **Users spend an average of 22.72 hours a week in MMOGs**
- Eight per cent play for 40 hours a week or more
- **70 per cent have spent ten hours or more in a single session**
- 27 per cent stated that the most positive experience of the last seven days was in the game
- **33 per cent stated that the most negative experience of the last seven days was in the game**
- 40 per cent think their online friends are comparable or better than their real friends
- **30 per cent of MMORPG players have told personal secrets online that they haven't admitted to anyone else**
- Men are three to five times more likely to gender-bend than women
- **At any one time, half of the female avatars are being controlled by men**
- 50 per cent work full-time
- **36 per cent work within the IT industry**
- 68 per cent have experience with tabletop RPGs
- **15.8 per cent of male respondents and 59.8 per cent of female respondents play with a romantic partner**
- 25.5 per cent of male respondents and 39.5 per cent of female respondents play with a family member
- **Ten per cent of users felt they had learned a lot about leadership**
- 40 per cent felt they had learned very little about leadership
- **15 per cent agreed strongly that they become angry or irritable if they cannot play**
- 30 per cent agreed that they continue to play even if they are not enjoying it
- **50 per cent of users considered themselves addicted in a straight yes/no question**
- 18 per cent of users admitted that MMOGs had caused them academic, health, financial or relationship problems



Case Study:
The Hoax

Sheyla Morrison had a tough life. Her mother died when she was 15, and she had a child of her own the year after. When the father claimed that she was an unfit mother, the baby was seized by the state, culminating in a year-long struggle to win back her child with no success. The time since was spent in the sanctuary of *EverQuest* where she had won many friends and sympathisers with her tales of hardship. Then, on 10 November 2000, Sheyla was fired from her position as a volunteer *EverQuest* guide. The next day Sheyla took her own life. *EverQuest's* bulletin boards lit up with poetic eulogies from her online friends, and the administrators were criticised for their insensitive handling of this unbalanced young woman. None of them knew, however, that Sheyla never existed in the first place.

A couple from Oklohoma City created Sheyla and her family, and in the weeks after the hoax was exposed thousands of posts from as many gamers littered bulletin boards. Inspired by the fiction of Sheyla, people poured forth with their stories of *EverQuest*-fuelled obsession and damaged personal lives. The tale caused countless gamers to examine their use of the game and question how meaningful their online friendships were. After all, when every person can present whatever image they want, how well can you really know anyone?

sense of close community that previous generations relied upon. "I hear many of the people I interview expressing a genuine confusion, a sense of impotence about how to connect," says Turkle. "There is a tremendous amount of insecurity about what kinds of jobs we'll have. How are we going to address the serious problems for our children: drugs, violence, education? People are very susceptible now to the notion that there's a better place somewhere over the rainbow."

While deaths are always a concern, a more common side-effect of retreat into the heightened, relatively consequence-free environment of the MMOG is a loss of interest in the real – surely the likely explanation for the abundant cases of financial troubles, lost jobs, neglected children and failed marriages. "If the politics of virtuality means democracy online and apathy offline then there is reason for concern," Turkle says. "Is it really sensible to suggest that the way to revitalise a community is to sit alone in our rooms, typing at our networked computers and filling our lives with virtual friends?'

The fear is that susceptible individuals will invest too much, replacing real life with the heightened reality of the game, and then find it difficult to leave should they need to. Yee's findings also reflect this – 50 per cent of users consider themselves addicted, 18 per cent admit that it has negatively affected their lives, and 15 per cent agree that they become angry or irritable if they are unable to participate; higher proportions than those who felt they had learned positive qualities from their time playing the game. Interviewed players claim, "There are serious withdrawal pangs, anxiety, and a feeling of being lost and not quite knowing what to do with yourself," and, "I call myself an addict because I share the same symptoms as someone who is addicted to smoking, alcohol or some other substance."

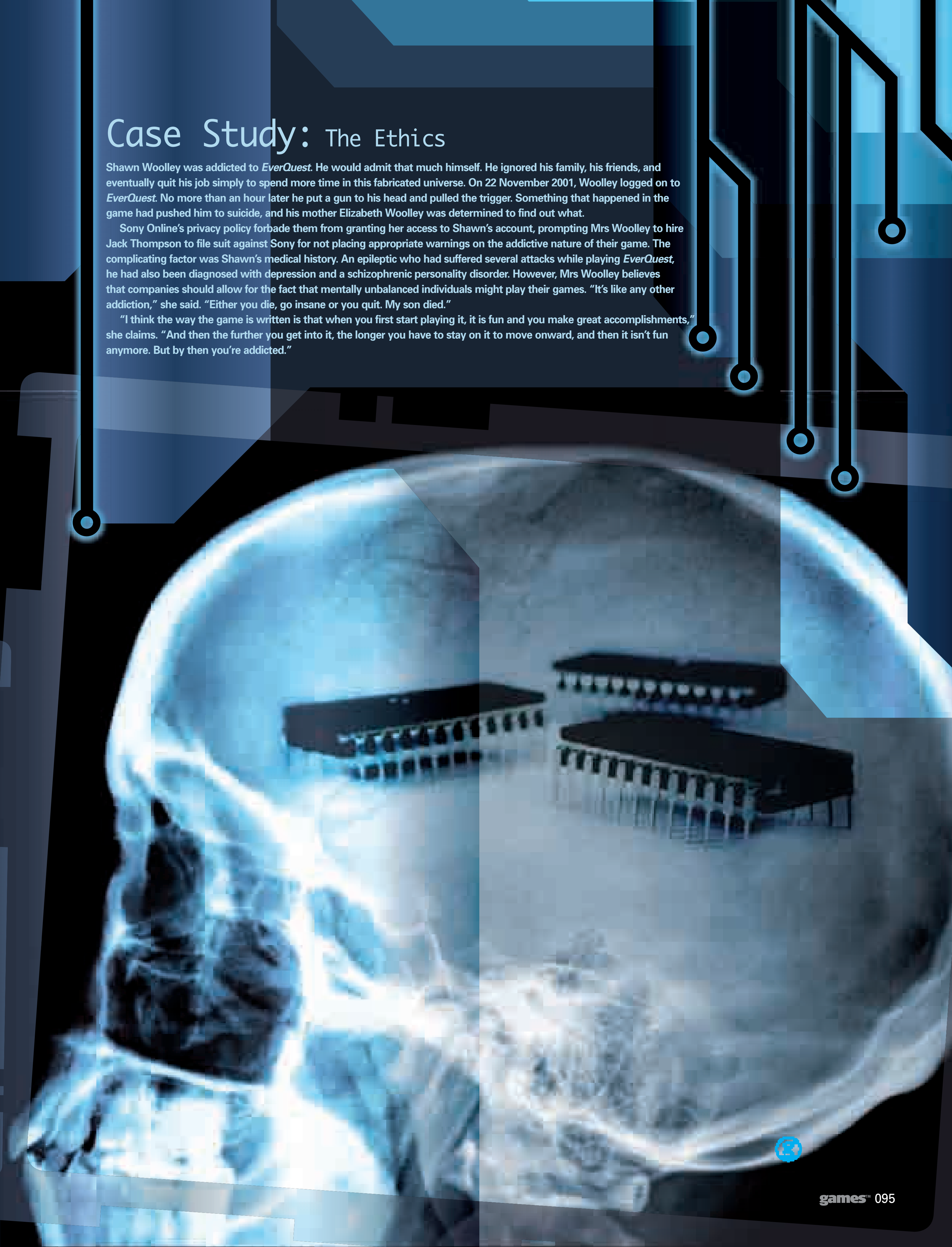
Nowhere is the problem more prevalent than in South Korea, where a government initiative resulted in three quarters of homes getting a high-speed broadband Internet connection. The neglect of real responsibilities due to excessive MMOG use has risen dramatically in the last few years, with people seeking help from the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity growing from 2,243 in 2003 to nearly 12,500 in 2005. This is a rise of 400 per cent, and should be taken as a warning by both the industry and gamers themselves to be mindful of the methods and motivations for use.

AN INEVITABLE FUTURE

It is important to understand that Turkle is not opposed to MMOGs, but she is one of the few thinkers who recognises both the advantages and problems of the concept. Addiction is a form of behavioural dependency, an old and well-understood problem, but too many voices suppress the notion that to susceptible people MMOGs can be dangerously addictive. The problem lies not with the games themselves but the players, and so the onus of responsibility lies not with the companies – like McDonalds being taken to task over the unhealthy nature of their food – but the people who use the product and those that care about them, ie parents, family, friends.

The growing number of institutions designed to help those who develop such problems is heartening, and moves us a step closer to what Yee and Turkle really want to see. "To the question, 'Why must virtuality and real life compete – why can't we have both?'" says Turkle. "The answer is of course that we will have both. The more important question is, 'How can we get the best of both?'"

"Having literally written our worlds into existence, we can use the communities we build inside our machines to improve the ones outside of them. Like the anthropologist returning home from a foreign culture, the voyager in virtuality can return to the real world better able to understand what about it is arbitrary and can be changed."



Case Study: The Ethics

Shawn Woolley was addicted to *EverQuest*. He would admit that much himself. He ignored his family, his friends, and eventually quit his job simply to spend more time in this fabricated universe. On 22 November 2001, Woolley logged on to *EverQuest*. No more than an hour later he put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. Something that happened in the game had pushed him to suicide, and his mother Elizabeth Woolley was determined to find out what.

Sony Online's privacy policy forbade them from granting her access to Shawn's account, prompting Mrs Woolley to hire Jack Thompson to file suit against Sony for not placing appropriate warnings on the addictive nature of their game. The complicating factor was Shawn's medical history. An epileptic who had suffered several attacks while playing *EverQuest*, he had also been diagnosed with depression and a schizophrenic personality disorder. However, Mrs Woolley believes that companies should allow for the fact that mentally unbalanced individuals might play their games. "It's like any other addiction," she said. "Either you die, go insane or you quit. My son died."

"I think the way the game is written is that when you first start playing it, it is fun and you make great accomplishments," she claims. "And then the further you get into it, the longer you have to stay on it to move onward, and then it isn't fun anymore. But by then you're addicted."



The Players

WITH A NEW GENERATION COMES UPDATED GRAPHICAL ACHIEVEMENTS, BUT ARE THEY IMPORTANT? JUN TAKEUCHI, PRODUCER OF LOST PLANET – ONE OF THE BETTER LOOKING NEXT-GEN TITLES – KNOWS THE SCORE BETTER THAN MOST…

JUN TAKEUCHI

CAPCOM JAPAN

E3 is a tough time for journalists, publishers and developers alike, but this time the developers involved with 360 titles had something new to face – the Nintendo Wii and PlayStation3 software line-up. Both have revealed new control methods to 'launch' us into the next generation – something Microsoft thought it did a while back. Jun Takeuchi, producer of Capcom's *Lost Planet* is in such a position, but does he regret not being given the chance to work with these fresh control systems? Does he feel as if he's been limited by a 'standard' hardware?

"It's the opposite," Takeuchi informs us. "Going with a piece of hardware that pushes innovation, that has new tricks and gadgets to make it seem like a great new experience just means you have to use that and you have to use it in a brand new sort of way to try and make games fun. By not being forced to use a new control scene you actually have more freedom to do what you want. The Xbox 360 is good because you don't have to use this new control. You can do what you know and concentrate on making it really good."

'Really good' seems a very apt phrase for describing *Lost Planet*, and it's obvious that Takeuchi is happy with the progress that the game has made. Almost every element has been designed to appeal. But in such a spectacular-feeling title, where does the key appeal lie? What do the people in charge put the most effort into? With the word 'innovation' being kicked around so much nowadays, it's hard to be sure what the developers think they should do and what they are being forced to do… "Well, one of the first things that attracts any person to want to pick up a game and play it is how good it looks," he admits. "And *Lost Planet*, with perhaps the exception of *Gears Of War*, is right now one of the best looking games you're going to see on the 360."

This is true, *Lost Planet* is looking superb visually, and it's also refreshing to hear such open praise for Microsoft's *Gears Of War*. The show's two most visually pleasing titles are both certainly impressive and the levels of realism that have been achieved are incredible – but where does Takeuchi feel these visuals are going to take us? It could make the classic 'games versus art' debate even more, well, debatable. It all looks so pretty…

"It's probably a little too early to look at *Lost Planet* and say, 'this is art'." Takeuchi laughs. "We certainly wouldn't want to exaggerate our talents. Although it does look beautiful, it's probably not to the level where you can stare at it for hours and admire it. That being said, the videogame is at a level where you can create visuals that are very close to Hollywood movies. You can create cinematic experiences and stories to that level and that's the direction we want to push toward. I suppose if you can consider maybe a movie as art – you could a game by that same rationale, but there are clearly other titles that we do that focus specifically on certain art style – something like *Okami*. Looking at the colours and the images – that could certainly be considered art."

There are few better opportunities for a producer to see how the public is going to react to its game than at E3. If you're going to receive a bad reaction when the game hits the shelves, then there's a fair chance you'll see a similar reaction from the usually oh-so optimistic masses present at the show. Being able to judge the crowd reaction as they play, observe or just walk by the early versions of your title must be very telling… "It's been a pretty good reaction so far," he admits with a keen nod. "People are playing for a long time, they're very intense and they're not thinking about going and playing other games – they are staying right with the game. You'll also hear people going past murmuring, 'Wow! *Lost Planet*. We've got to go see that'. It makes us feel very good."

Looking around E3 this year, we soon notice that, as usual, sequels and follow-ups are the main order of the day and that original IPs, such as *Lost Planet*, are relatively few and far between. There seems to be a certain fear when it comes to going out on a limb and giving the gaming public something brand new, and we're seeing titles that are aleady recognised reappearing – with ever-growing numbers – next to the name. But that seems to be what a certain section of the gaming public wants; titles and heroes that they already know, and stories in which they are already semi-involved. We guess it's just easier than having to apply yourself all over again, and is something that appeals greatly to the more casual players out there. Does this concern the man charged with producing this particular original title? Maybe just a little… "That's why we're busy watching and listening to what people are doing here today," he smiles. "We just hope everyone gets to play the game and that they all like it."

Lost Planet *is out Q1 '07 on Xbox 360 and was previewed in issue 41.*



"IT'S PROBABLY A LITTLE TOO EARLY TO LOOK AT LOST PLANET AND SAY, 'THIS IS ART'. WE CERTAINLY WOULDN'T WANT TO EXAGGERATE OUR TALENTS"

JUN TAKEUCHI

Odd ones out

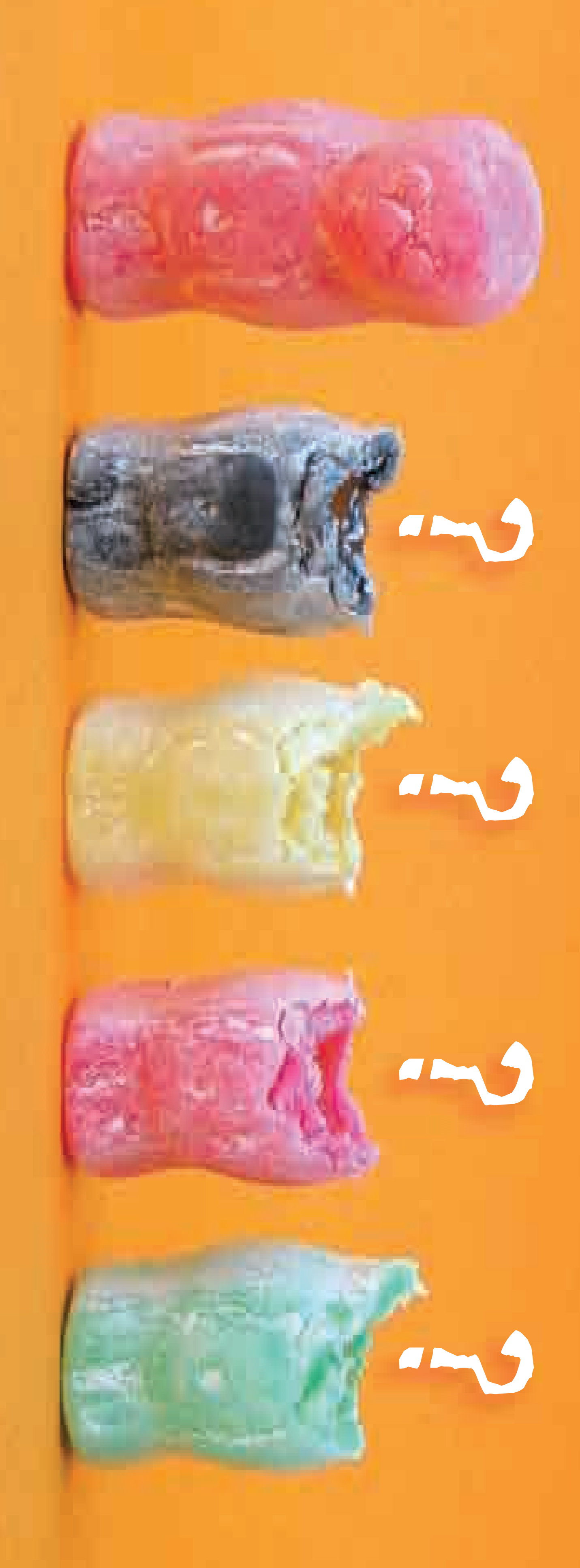
THE MAINSTREAM VIDEOGAMES MARKET DEMANDS A CERTAIN LEVEL OF SENSE, BUT THERE ARE SOME DEVELOPERS THAT HAVE SIMPLY IGNORED THIS AND OPTED TO DO THEIR OWN THING – A TWISTED PEEK AT THE NOT SO NORMAL IS CERTAINLY IN ORDER…

The graphics in *Metal Gear Solid 4* are so gorgeous that they frighten the hell out of many untrained gamers. The semi-organic legs and the otherwise lack of animal warmth from the new *Metal Gear* robots, portrayed in such high definition, is ghastly. Kojima is a master of manipulating his medium; his *Metal Gear Solid 2* left players in control of a character who was the polar opposite of the series' main hero, because Kojima wanted the player to realise that much as he was playing as that hero in the previous game, he never actually became that hero. Forcing the player to play as Raiden was a brilliant, if misunderstood move – it let the player view the bad-ass hero Snake from farther than they previously had. This was a strategy positioned to make us realise that getting mad at a game for not allowing us to pretend to be who we want to pretend to be is extremely silly of us. Kojima is, quite frankly, trying to encourage you to do something with your life other than pretend to be someone else. In short: he makes weird games. In long: games are actually, essentially, of a bizarre medium.

Kojima's weirdest accomplishment, if you ask us, is making an entire game – a giant-robot-opera called *Zone Of The Enders* – around the idea of a game having a final boss that you cannot kill. In other words, you must run – as quickly as possible. This is Kojima defying design conventions in the least noticeable manner possible. His game *Boktai*, with a sun sensor in the cartridge, forces you to play the game outside. That's as big a statement as any.

If these things don't sound quite ridiculous to you, then congratulations, you've played too many videogames. You've played so many that you forgot that feeling, didn't you? You probably don't even know what feeling we're talking about, do you? We ourselves didn't remember it until sitting down and outlining this article. The feeling we're talking about is that bizarre dread. This feeling most likely occurred to you the first time you played *Super Mario Bros*: "Wait… why am I jumping so much? I've never jumped over a real obstacle in my whole life? Then again, I'm only six years old… oh dear God… why do these mushrooms make me grow?" A few years later you might have rented Data East's *Karnov*, a game about a fat, fire-breathing circus performer battling dinosaurs, for God's sake – and you might have thought it was just good fun. Since then, there's been no saving you.

There are, alas, far too many bizarre videogames to mention all of them (it is a bizarre medium, remember). Nevertheless, We've assembled a list of oddities that stick out like broken bones from wounds. Let the parade begin…



PANIC!
Sega / Sega CD / 1992

Panic!, also known as *Switch*, is a game by Sega Japan. The main character is a little boy in purple overalls, with a purple baseball cap. He has a dog. There's a TV remote involved and you press buttons to activate different 'channels' in the television. In the very beginning, your house is completely erased. Is there a resolution? The instruction manual consists of merely this:

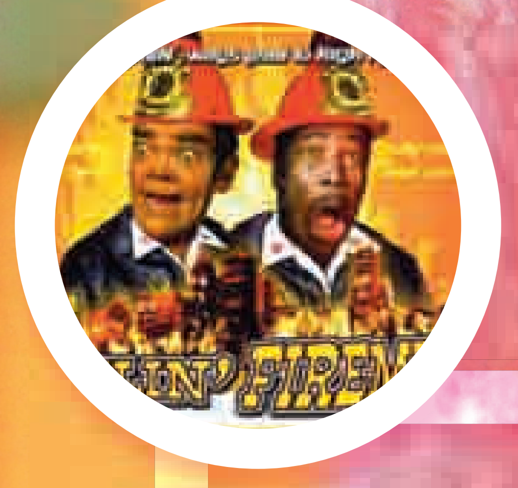
1. Sit back and relax. Enjoy the funny screens. 2. Laugh at the funny gags. What will happen next? 3. You can save the game if you get tired. 4. Keep your eyes on the game. 5. All up-left buttons (switches) have gags.

Almost none of the 'gags' make sense. You might see a sumo crawling around like a baby. You might see a little man crawl out of the Mona Lisa's dress, sneak around behind her head, and start making obscene sounds. There is vomiting. What the hell is going on?

Some boast that there are more than 1,000 scenes in the game, and that some only come up once. Sometimes, you'll see the same gag more than once, so it's good to get a pen and paper and write down which switches activate which gags from which screens. There are flowcharts online if you want to research gag frequency.

Unfortunately for Sega CD design, the future of full-motion-video-based games was not to follow *Panic!*'s example. We ended up with games like *Sewer Shark* that tried to put action shooting sequences between pieces of an incoherent story about guys racing spaceships in sewers, or *Night Trap* which caused a controversy among American politicians because it starred real girls who couldn't act.

"YOU MIGHT SEE A MAN CRAWL OUT OF THE MONA LISA'S DRESS, AND START MAKING OBSCENE SOUNDS BEHIND HER"



DUELIN' FIREMEN!
RUNANDGUN! / 3DO / 1994 (unreleased)

John "Dolemite" Los, Rudy Ray Moore, Timothy Leary, Mark Mothersbaugh, Steve Albini, Tony Hawk, and others star in an unreleased videogame about fighting fires. Kind of. Well, we can only guess what the game was actually about. According to some famous trailers that have surfaced online, the game begins on 4 July 1999, "The hottest day of the year." An airplane and a space shuttle crash into the Sears Tower in Chicago, Illinois, setting off a vicious blaze. The entire city of Chicago is engulfed in flames. Two rival firefighters – Chief Cripsy and Chief Cap'm – take to the streets to fight fires. It turns out that although the city is burning, everyone is content to relax in dance clubs and get drunk. There is screaming. And aliens. And dancing. Apparently, the goal was to defeat alien invaders and also score a record contract. Japan's most famous noise-rock band The Boredoms provided the music.

Why wasn't this game released? Because it was too weird, of course. So, they filmed all this FMV, and then what happened? Our guess is they showed it to someone who quickly said "What?" They ended up never working in this town, or any town, ever again.

TAKESHI NO CHOUSENJOU (Takeshi's Challenge)

Taito / Super Famicom / 1986

Takeshi's Challenge was cited as one of Shigesato Itoi's inspirations for the *Mother* series. There is more weird than meets the eyes, ears, or fingertips in this game: some challenges require the player to sing continuously into the Famicom Controller II's built-in microphone for one hour without pressing any buttons, and the final boss, for example, takes 20,000 hits to kill. 20,000 is a lot of hits. At the rate of fire utilised in the game, that's about three hours of shooting. The art design is varied and eccentric. Sometimes stages resemble real settings such as a company office, sometimes it's the blackness of the 8-bit void.

The game is perhaps most famous for its opening screen, stating, "This game is made by a man who hates videogames." The 'man' responsible was of course Japanese comedian/writer/musician Beat Takeshi, who would, soon after making this game, direct his first film. He was still making films 20 years later, so he's a film director. He's obviously not a game producer. Though Hideo Kojima and Shigesato Itoi are both outspoken admirers of *Takeshi's Challenge*, it's not exactly a good game or even a worthwhile one. It sure is fantastically interesting, however. Even more interesting are the famous (and true) stories about how children were calling Nintendo's hint line and then weeping when they couldn't figure out such and such a challenge.

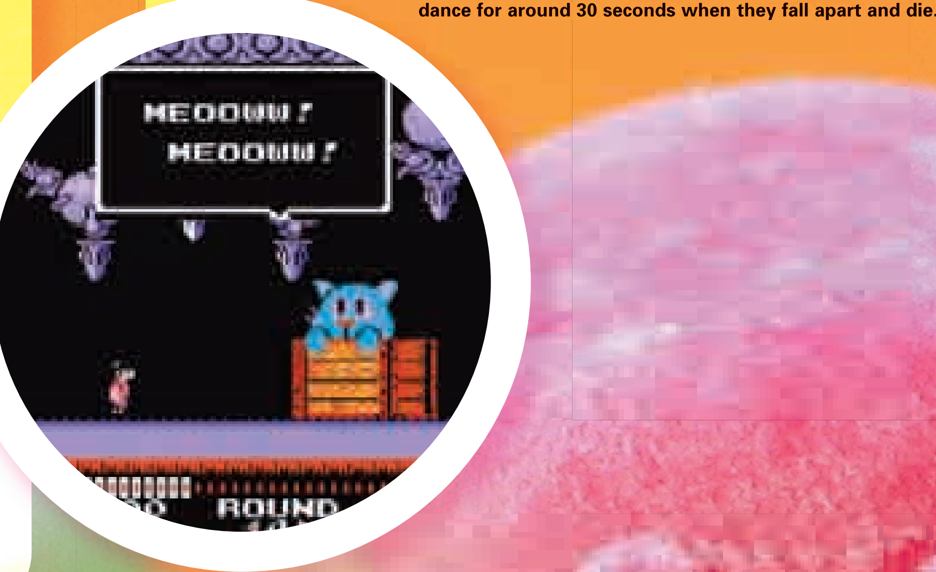
MONSTER PARTY

Bandai / NES / 1989

Ah yes, *Monster Party*. This game tells you what's up from the start. You're a boy on the way home from a Little League baseball game. A gargoyle spies you, sees your bat, thinks it's a weapon, and asks you to go to his planet and kill the monsters. You then go to his planet and fight monsters, with a baseball bat. There are some relentless bosses and some hideous glitches. There's a certain boss, late in the game, that you're supposed to not fight, because if you fight him you can't get the key to the next stage.

The ending of *Monster Party* sees the gargoyle giving the hero a box which he takes home. He opens it. Inside is a beautiful princess. He gets excited. The princess's skin melts. She turns into a zombie. More zombies appear. The hero wakes up in bed. It was just a dream. His mother tells him to get ready for school. He rushes to the door – and there's the gargoyle. "Let's do it again!" he says.

As far as conceptual weirdness goes, this game featured two bosses you didn't have to fight. The second boss was a giant spider sprawled out in the middle of the floor. You walk into the room, and he says to you, "Sorry. I'm dead." In other words – he's already dead. You win. Later in the game, you face a pair of dancing zombies. They say, at the beginning of the fight, "Watch us dance". So you stand there and watch them dance for around 30 seconds when they fall apart and die.



"GAMES ARE INNATELY BIZARRE AND STRANGE CREATIONS IN WHICH BEINGS WITH REAL LIVES WILL GLADLY PRETEND TO BE A WEEPING CAT IN AN APRON"

LA-LA LAND 4

Game Maker (amateur PC Game)/ 2004/programmed by Matt Aldridge

One of our personal favourites is *La-La Land 4*. The hero is a human-like cat named Biggt, in an apron and chef's hat. He is stirring a pot in the lower right-hand corner of the title screen, sometimes crying. The title splash sits in the middle of a menacing grey spotlight. Behind the spotlights are grey brick staircases over a black background. In the middle of the right side of the screen is a smaller version of Biggt. In the upper left, is a second small Biggt. There are two small, brown doors – one at the top of the screen, and one at the bottom. Use the arrow keys to move both Biggts at once. Press up to jump. As you move, the Biggt in the corner stirs the pot. What you want to do is get both Biggts in the doors. A funeral dirge plays throughout. It's possible to mess up and then never be able to get into either door. Getting in the door at the bottom requires getting the Biggt on the right-hand side up some stairs, and then falling behind the opaque spotlight. If you mess up, you have to restart.

Get into both doors, and the background falls away. Now it's Biggt stirring the pot, alone. A purple lizard in a tuxedo appears and screams, in digitised voice, "Biggt! It's time to serve the gests! [sic] Nowwwwwww!!" Biggt is scared. We are now in control of his sprint as he runs away from his lizard boss. The next screen sees him fighting against a crying, tall young boy. To 'fight' you just walk into him. He cries, "Stop pushing me!" Run into him enough times and he disappears, and the red heart at the top of the screen descends and opens up. You enter it and it flies you to the moon where there is a female cat. You run toward her with anti-gravity steps. Every time you get close to her, a terrifying sound rips your ears and you're pushed away. Eventually, after holding the left arrow key long enough, you're allowed to reach her, and she turns into your face, huge, disembodied. Run away – holding the right arrow key, as the face makes thumping sounds and asks you why you're running away. At the end of the hall is a bed. Jump into it. The screen then shows the image of Biggt crying, and the words, "...and that was that".

Matt Aldridge, the man responsible for this, says, "Had I been subject to any really weird games, I doubt I would have felt the need to make any myself. I think the purpose of me actually making these games was to get something out of my system that I couldn't find solace in anywhere else. Call it avante-garde trash or whatever." We don't call it trash, Aldridge has crafted *La-La Land* with an unspoken understanding that games are innately bizarre and strange creations in which beings with real lives will gladly pretend to be a weeping cat in an apron.





SNACKS 'N' JAXSON

Bally / Arcade / 1984

This is an arcade game where a clown sits at the head of a checkered-tableclothed table. The player feeds him breakfast. The clown's neck stretches, he bounces around on his nose and he makes psychotic sounds. His neck is literally, maybe, like, five meters long. If you'd ever been wandering around an arcade on a boardwalk on a beach on a pleasant summer night, when roughly five years old, with a pocketful of American quarters, back in 1984 – you may have seen it and laughed a lot.

ALIEN SOLDIER

Treasure / Sega Mega Drive / 1995

Alien Soldier is a legendary game for its morbid difficulty. It is the work of Treasure, the ex-developer of *Contra*, which splashed into fame with *Gunstar Heroes*, the safest, most agreeable side-scrolling action shooting game in 1993. In 1994, it released *Dynamite Headdy* which was supposed to be its appeal to a mass audience. Headdy was a mascot who threw his head at enemies. He was a puppet locked in a war against robots. The game was horrifyingly difficult for any child under 29. The first stage sees you murdering a cat with human qualities with the famous Hokusai 'Wave' painting in the background. The third stage sees you fighting a prancing, sausage-bodied reindeer robot with a cat's face in his bellybutton, before a tin-soldier orchestra playing a bizarre rendition of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker March.

So Treasure's mainstream career was shot to hell. The next game it made was *Alien Soldier*. Well, at least, that's what it was called when it was released in Europe. In Japan, its full title is, and we quote: VISUALSHOCK! SPEEDSHOCK! SOUNDSHOCK! NOW IS TIME TO THE 68000 HEART ON FIRE! ALIEN SOLIDER FOR MEGADRIVERS CUSTOM.

What this means, our greatest linguists cannot be certain. The Japanese version's opening story roll is in English that differs vastly from the European intro (you can switch between versions on the recently released Treasure Box compilation for PlayStation2), but anyhow, the game is about a robot suit with the head of a bird. He battles enemies for about three seconds, and then faces bosses. There's a frog with a little hole that spits out eggs, for example. It's all handled very seriously, and the gameplay is super-tough. There are even serious techniques involved, like an Air Freeze and a Teleportation Dash.

What we wish to call your attention to, however, is this one moment in the game after you've fought across futuristic oilrigs, through an airport and on top of a soaring jet. You're in these sewers, and there's this speedboat overcome by lobsters. There's a blue teddy bear sitting there saying "HELP!" in big yellow text. You kill the lobsters, and the bear gets up, shakes his head, and hops into the controls. He then says – head still twitching – the two distinct words "LET'S GO." He says it like he has a throat full of sugar and he's trying to make it in the radio business. Something that he can't possibly do unless he swallows the sugar. The boat moves at a frightful velocity. Eventually a boss appears and throws the bear off. The bear enters the water, engulfed in high-speed flames.



"ALIEN SOLDIER WAS HORRIFYINGLY DIFFICULT FOR ANY CHILD UNDER 29"



MAGIC CAROUSEL

Mattel / Intellivision / 1982

The weirdest videogame of all time, and by far the most terrifying of any heavy-handed *Silent Hill* is one called *Magic Carousel*, released in 1982 for the Intellivision. If you like (and we kind of recommend it) you can find it on the Intellivision Lives! collection for Xbox.

Being an Intellivision game, *Magic Carousel* has better graphics than most things released in 1982. In other words, you can tell that the thing on the screen is a carousel. It even seems to rotate (in other words, the large blocks representing its walls change size with appropriate rhythm). There are animals on the carousel. There's a deer, a lion, a unicorn, and something else we don't remember. A digitised voice screams "HURRY HURRY HURRY STEP RIGHT UP." It's supposed to sound like a circus barker. You press any button and the carousel starts to rotate with a terrifying, rocket-ship-like sound. If you press any button again, the voice screams "WAIT FOR THE DEER." The digitisation makes it sound kind of like "WAIT FOR IT THEEEER." When the deer is coming around, the voice shouts, "HERE COMES THE DEER." Press any button to stop the carousel when the deer is showing in the front panel. The border lights up and the fire alarms sound. A crowd roars. It sounds like your television just had its ears unplugged.

The screen fades out. It's back in an instant. Now the carousel is smaller in the background. There are several icons floating around the carousel, none of which have any clear shape. You can move the deer. It floats like a ghost. Not a millisecond into your new body, a phone rings with an ear-stabbing sound. "ANSWER THE PHONE!!" Where the hell is the phone? It's one of the icons. You use the Intellivision keypad to answer the phone. The handset hovers. The voice crackles: "HELLOO? NOW LET'S DRINK THE MILK." And then… oh my god. A glass of milk appears. You walk to it, and there is a straw stuck into the deer's neck. The sound of an ogre gargling cobblestones shakes your television speakers, the milk slowly drains, and the milk is gone.

The phone begins to ring again. You answer it, trembling. "HELLOO? NOW BLOW UP [fooooooooour] BALLOONS" – the voice cuts off as though without punctuation; the number is spoken in a completely different, somewhat demonic voice. You walk to the balloons, press the 'balloon' button, and they begin to inflate and fly off as the disembodied voice counts them.

Ring. Ring. Ring. "HELLOO? NOW LET'S TAKE A PICTURE." Find the camera. Take a picture. A Polaroid of the deer's head pops out. The voice screams in computer delight, "BACK TO THE CAROUSEL." You take your place on the carousel again. It begins to rotate. "WAIT FOR THE LION."

This game never ends. You continue heeding the commands of the disembodied voice, watching the carousel turn against a black sky for all eternity.

MOTHER 2
Shigesato Itoi / Super Famicom / 1994

A standard, *Dragon Quest*-like RPG written with a playful, literary wit, and set in a modern world overcome with aliens, *Mother 2* certainly isn't normal when you consider other games of its time. Though is it truly weird? That depends. It seems that games are at their weirdest when something bright turns black (or vice versa), or else when the game terrifies the player without trying to. *Mother 2* was made with the knowledge that games are a bizarre, contrary little medium; the game invites you to name the main characters whatever you want, even suggesting examples like 'Penis' (in the Japanese version only) to those with the minds of nine year olds. Author Shigesato Itoi knows that many gamers have the minds of nine year olds, and so he exploits these minds to great effect. Precisely halfway through the game, your main character will receive a phone call, and be asked his real name. You type in the name, promise you're telling the truth, promise again, and then hang up.

Some 20 hours later, at the end of the game, you face a boss who is, quite literally, impossible, even with maximum levels. The only way to beat him is with the 'Prayer' command that one of the characters has possessed since the beginning. Once you've done this some 20 times in a row (taking breaks to heal), and all of the characters in the game world are exhausted, your prayers start doing massive damage. Then it's revealed who is praying for the boss to die: you, the player. Your name is right there on screen, and you don't remember putting it in. Meanwhile, the boss begins begging for mercy, speaking in lines that Shigesato Itoi has explained he heard a woman screaming in a rape scene in a movie when he was nine years old and walked into the wrong movie theatre. The game is, "to evoke the horrible feeling of being responsible for your own mother's death". It is quite morbid and strange. In the end, most likely, you will feel very terrible.

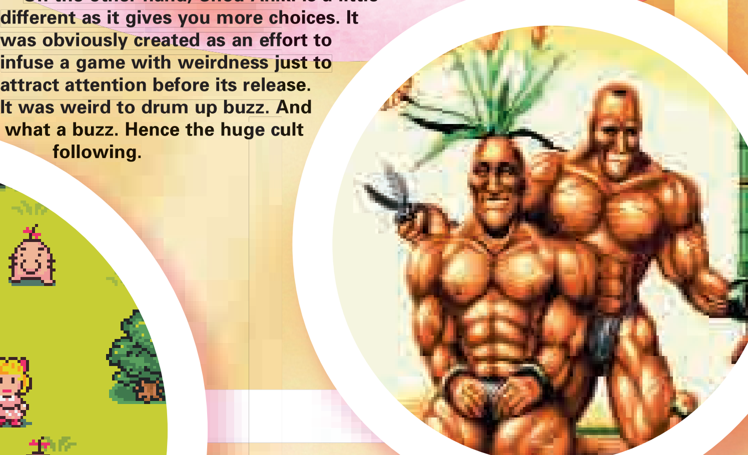
There are dark spots and light spots in the journey, laid out in the game. There are weird little guys called Mr Saturn who speak in stylised font. There's a subterranean world where your characters are displayed at quarter size, where people live in caged towns, explaining that the dinosaurs running rampant outside are the ones in the cages. There's a man who wants to be a dungeon, and he gets his dream (years ahead of *Shadow Of The Colossus*). There is even a doctor in the rainforest, who will heal you and then bill you, asking that you come all the way back there to repay him at some later point. Of course, you might forget about this, resulting in him calling your dad. After the game has ended, the credits roll and you see your house. Your dad calls. He says he paid back the doctor in the rainforest. That's how the game ends.

CHOU ANIKI
Masaya / Various / Various

Chou Aniki, meaning 'Super Big Brother', is a game about a couple of kids who summon flying super-warriors in order to save their planet. Sounds okay so far, for a Japanese game. Well, except these guys are bikini-brief-clad body-builders with bald heads and vaguely monkey-like faces. They also have holes in the top of their heads. Which makes them look a bit like the male genitalia. Their super attacks are equally suspect. The bosses tend to be naked men.

As it goes, this series has a huge cult following. Why has Chou Aniki continued as a series? Well, for one thing all the games have decent gameplay – Masaya also made Gynoug, (known as Wings Of Wor outside Japan), and that was pretty good. We guess Gynoug wasn't as popular because it had no backbone; just a winged man collecting power-ups – although we like the power-ups in Gynoug because there's only one of them. You just keep picking it up, and keep getting stronger. No options, no choice. It's a solid game.

On the other hand, Chou Aniki is a little different as it gives you more choices. It was obviously created as an effort to infuse a game with weirdness just to attract attention before its release. It was weird to drum up buzz. And what a buzz. Hence the huge cult following.



"THESE GUYS ARE BIKINI-BRIEF-CLAD BODY-BUILDERS WITH BALD HEADS AND VAGUELY MONKEY-LIKE FACES"

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.




JESUS SAVES
KILLER
SLAYS FIFTEEN !

OKAMI

CAPCOM DELIVERS ITS FINEST ORIGINAL GAME SINCE VIEWTIFUL JOE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Clover Studio

PRICE
¥6,800

RELEASE
7 July
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Wolves are either powerful animals or feeble footballers. Fortunately, Capcom's recently formed Clover Studio decided it would be better to develop a game around the ancient Japanese legend of a godlike wolf than, you know, anything to do with Glenn Hoddle. *Okami* begins with a narrative – which lasts almost ten minutes – told through a scrolling storyboard of Japanese text and beautiful paintings. You are Amaterasu, a sun god transformed into a wolf's form. The world is full of demons and only Amaterasu, the Okami (a pun on 'God' and 'wolf') of this world, can save this beautiful place from their evil influence.

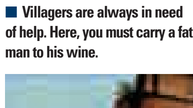
Your initiation into the world of *Okami* is Nintendo-esque: the first half hour is spent being trained without Capcom making it overly obvious that training is underway. By the time you step out from the starry-skied introductory area of Heavenly Stream it has been made clear what you can do in this world and what effect it will have.

Okami's unique feature is a masterstroke. To be more specific, it's the stroke of what Clover describes as a 'Celestial Brush' across the screen. Hold R1 and the screen freezes, becomes a black-ink-on-brown-paper static frame, and equips you with the brush – just paint over the scene and your strokes can work wonders. You'll need to paint lines – from one side of a river to the other in order to cross it on a bridge – which your artistic experiment brings to life. You'll need to draw circles in the sky and conclusions to unfinished statues and buildings, all to complete the gameworld and pave your way through it. There are also dot-to-dot puzzles to complete. In battles, you can even finish enemies off with a strike of ink.

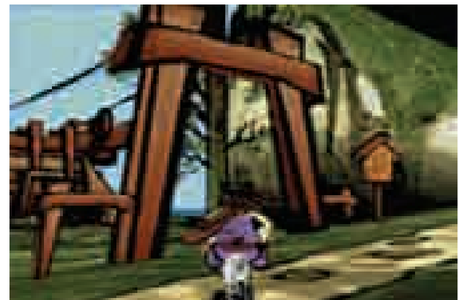
These artistic elements could easily have been gimmicky, but they're not. The genius of this design is that it adds variety that doesn't feel tacked on; before long, control of the Celestial Brush becomes intuitive to the extent that you'll use the system automatically when it's called for. No guesswork is required because the opportunities to paint are there if you know how to look for them, yet they're not so childishly obvious as to patronise you. *Okami* rewards lateral thinking.

Controlling Amaterasu is a joy; the four-legged creature actually uses all four limbs to run. The animation is flawlessly wolfish, magically conveying – through Dual Shock 2 – the feeling of animal movement. The left analogue stick is used to affect everything from a tiptoe to a walk,

"AN UNINTENTIONAL BENEFIT OF OKAMI'S MASTERFUL ANIMATION IS THAT YOU WILL GRADUALLY BECOME ATTACHED TO THIS UNLIKELIEST OF GAME HEROES – AMATERASU IS 'ALIVE'"

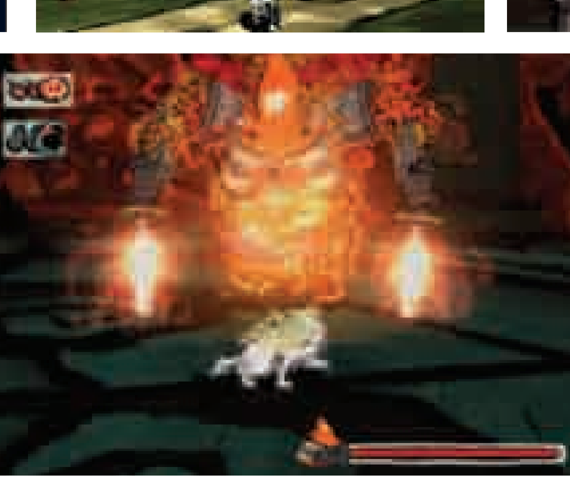


Villagers are always in need of help. Here, you must carry a fat man to his wine.





Bosses tend to lurk at the end of exquisitely well-constructed, *Zelda*-esque dungeons.



FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

SNAP: Controlling *Okami's* camera with the right analogue stick is simplicity itself.

SAVE: *Okami* gives you ten save slots, so there's no need to argue with your partner/sibling/child.

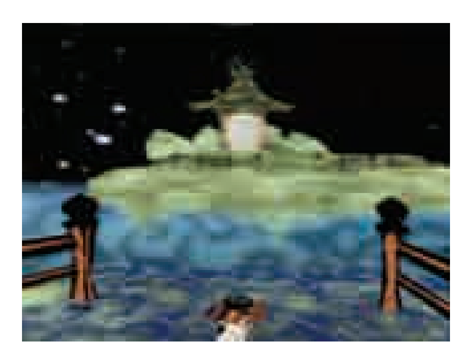
SABRE WULF

Granted, Amaterasu is a god in the form of a wolf, but weapons and special powers still come in handy throughout *Okami*. The game provides you with upgraded skills at set points as you explore the world, but there are also plenty of shops in villages, from which you can buy new items. Amaterasu's basic abilities (brush-related or otherwise), such as the power to cut things and the power to bomb them, can be 'level-upped' by collecting 'happiness' and then apportioning that happiness to your various abilities as you see fit.



■ Amaterasu won't have bloody great swords on her back until well into the game – at first it's just a mirror.

■ A wolf's instincts aren't subdued by the presence of a sun god in its body, seemingly.



■ Your very first Celestial Brush task – creating a pathway of water over nothingness.



■ Demonic symbols swing around the red-and-black walls of the combat chamber, creating a surprising sense of foreboding.



■ Just LOOK at it. *Okami* is neverending in its beauty, absolutely sumptuous from start to finish.

and a run to a full-on gasping sprint. Momentum is gained and lost in a natural way so, in contrast with so many dumb-ass PS2 game characters, Amaterasu doesn't just 'go' and 'stop'. Amaterasu is 'alive' – an unintentional benefit of this masterful animation is that you will gradually become attached to this unlikeliest of game heroes. (Perhaps the Emotion Engine has finally delivered on its nonsense promise in a way not even Sony could have anticipated.)

The beauty of *Okami's* visuals is not simply due to its competent use of cel-shading. There's something more here. Something that shows that art direction is more important than technology. The game looks and feels like a dream. The manual is even printed on washi, special Japanese paper made from rice. The paper's unique texture is visible even in-game: swing the camera to look into an open space or morning sky and you can see the faint watermark of washi. As you play through, you're unlikely to have any thoughts of pixels and polygons – this is a game made with fine paper and ink. Even inconsequential things such as the game's backdrops are given attention: look away from a coast and you'll see faint outlines of distant Fuji-type volcanoes drawn in the traditional Japanese style. No matter where you look, *Okami* has something beautiful to show.

In most game reviews the writer can get away with a single sentence to mention the game's music. With *Okami* that would be cruel. Not only is its score a worthy match for its visual presentation, but also at times it excels beyond what you're seeing. There are traditional Japanese instruments such as the koto, sanshin and taiko beautifully mixed with lush strings and foresty percussion.

FAQs

Q. WHAT DOES OKAMI MEAN?
A. It can mean god and it can mean wolf. In Capcom's case it's a bit of both.

Q. DOES OKAMI HAVE SAVE POINTS?
A. Yes. Magic mirrors are located in most areas of the map; look into the light and save away.

Q. DOES THE GAME FEATURE A DAY-TO-NIGHT SYSTEM?
A. Yes, now that you mention it, it does. The full day-night cycle runs through in about 20 minutes. Evening is especially beautiful.

"THE AUDIO WORK IS OF THE HIGHEST ORDER AND ADDS TO THE FANTASTIC SENSE OF OTHERWORLDLINESS WHICH OKAMI GETS SO VERY DAMN RIGHT"

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

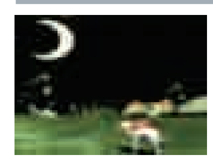
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

5 mins



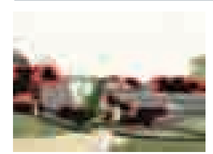
Okami makes great use of the traditional Japanese style of storytelling. The scroll, um, scrolls from right to left as *Okami's* fate and that of the demon-packed world are set out.

1 HOURS



Okami's Heavenly Stream is one of the most inspired opening stages of any game we've played, guiding Amaterasu through basic training under a stunning night sky.

10 HOURS



With the first few villages out of the way, Kyoto beckons. You've had some significant battles now and Amaterasu's abilities should be nicely 'level-upped'.

The tempo of the arrangements is perfectly synced with what's happening on screen, so as the action builds so too does the music. And when something major happens – a boss is defeated or a dramatic cut-scene kicks in – the soundtrack explodes. It's exhilarating stuff – audio work of the highest order. Although there are no intelligible voice tracks, each character mumbles his/her spiel in a pattern of tones which befits the script. In fact, that only adds to the sensation of fantastic otherworldliness which *Okami* gets so very damn right.

To classify this as an 'action-adventure' would be pretty stupid. 'Adventure' is an oversimplification; let's just say that Clover Studio has created an incredible world for you to exist in and a fascinating story for you to be a part of. The most obvious point of reference in comparison is Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda* post-*Ocarina Of Time*. The ingredients for both magic potions are taken from the same cookbook: ladles of puzzles, interaction with quirky locals, confined battle scenes and big bosses.

Battles in *Okami* are not particularly difficult, but they maintain a decent level of challenge while stopping just short of posing a genuine threat to Amaterasu's life. That goes for the game as a rule: you're never likely to get stuck, and there's even less danger of getting lost, but at the same time there's no concern over it being too easy. The challenge of playing your role in this story, and playing it well, is a fine thing in itself.



Enemies, when first encountered, are introduced on a gorgeous scroll.

Naturally, *Okami's* boss characters are out to wreck your quest but, as with typical pre-boss battle encounters against demonised forest animals, Amaterasu is powerful enough to rid the world of these enemies without having to rely on continues or extra lives. Boss fights are dominated by screen-filling monsters, loosely modelled on insects and animals but re-imagined as giant freaky versions of spiders and dragons. Defeating these monsters (in a nod to *Zelda*) depends on finding their weak points and then attacking quickly and efficiently. There's really no need for a maxed-out difficulty level in a game of *Okami's* vision and scope; as it stands, this demands a good 30 hours of your attention.

Even over such a long period of time, your interest is never likely to wane. The progression of the storyline is never rushed.

No, really, just LOOK at it. The boss battles especially are the stuff of spectacle.



The whole game is distinctly organic – enemies and environments are all modelled on the natural world.

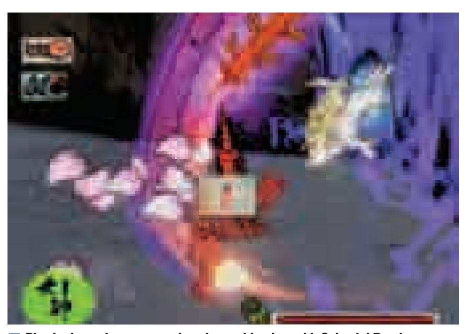
FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

PUZZLED: Puzzles include tasks like digging up vegetables from an allotment in record time.

INKED: The 'Celestial Brush' revisits memories of classic painting games such as *Mojib Ribbon*.

MIGHTY PEN

You'll be hitting R1 to paint your way through *Okami* every few minutes. There are two reasons why it doesn't become tedious: first, delicate analogue control of the Celestial Brush and freedom to paint as you wish ensure that it's a satisfying pursuit. And second, there's a diverse range of situations in which you need to use the brush. Sometimes you bring things to life, painting dead cherry trees to make them blossom and drawing light circles to shine on darkened areas. Other times you paint to destroy, cutting rocks to open up new paths and striking enemies in battle with a finishing stroke.



■ Physical attacks serve you best in combination with Celestial Brush techniques in battle.

Human inhabitants are keen to inform you of details which, although they only rarely explain anything important, nevertheless add colour to *Okami*'s rich world. Instead of simply populating the place with drones on repeat, Clover has done the right thing by creating every single character – even minor players – with a distinctly unique personality. Thanks to this level of care, *Okami*'s is a memorable and likeable cast.

Your interaction with the human population is similar to Link's relationship with the people of Hyrule: you're often requested to help the locals with their problems. A villager will ask for assistance as he attempts to move a large boulder, for example, and a small child will need your help when fishing at the riverside. You're not obliged to carry out these tasks, but Amaterasu can thanks to that handy paintbrush. Should you choose to be helpful you'll be rewarded – that's how *Okami* is set up – plus, of course, you'll have the satisfaction of contributing something positive to the demon-filled gameworld while you set about restoring beautiful harmony to the place.



■ Projectile beads, hard-hitting swords and various mirrors are all acquired through the course of the game.

All the way through, there's something oddly noble about Okami. Hayao Miyazaki's Princess Mononoke brought the deep forest theme of Japan's ancient mythology to life in anime movie form, and Atsushi Inaba's Okami does the same thing in a videogame context. Both works are obviously labours of love and both will leave you with a feeling of supreme satisfaction. *Okami* is one of the finest PlayStation2 games out there, no question, and it's one of Capcom's greatest ever 3D productions. The bottom line: this is a game you can really care about.

VERDICT 9/10

A GAME OF RARE QUALITY WHICH SHOULD BE SAVOURED

GRAFFITI KINGDOM



MUCH BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

MAKE YOUR OWN HISTORY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Stainless Steel/ Midway

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
16 June

PLAYERS
1-8

MIN SPEC
Windows 2000/ME/XP, 1.5Ghz Processor, 512MB RAM

Real-time strategy games have something of a bad reputation. There are hundreds of them covering virtually every human conflict you could possibly imagine. Nearly all of these are incredibly dull. Boring, lifeless clones with very little imagination and absolutely nothing to offer in the way of entertainment. But every so often you get one that is worth playing. Unlike other genres, an RTS can only be good or bad. There is no hazy middle ground, the sheer volume of effort needed to play an RTS completely removes that possibility from the equation. *Rise & Fall* is one of the good guys, although it doesn't start off that way.

The opening few stages for each civilisation are incredibly basic. You have to put in a good few hours before you get access to everything this has to offer. At the beginning of the campaign it is simply a case of point, click, kill. It's not until much later that you have to worry about resources, army management and tactics. It's a gentle learning curve that almost seems patronising at times and certainly does little to complement the game, especially if you're a seasoned RTS player.

It soon becomes clear that not only is this a deep, well-crafted and carefully balanced RTS, brimming with features, but also that the developer is desperately trying to encourage a wider audience than the core strategy crowd. Enter the third-person hack 'n' slash Hero mode. In *Rise & Fall*, wood and gold are the main resources to be harvested, these allow you to build structures and units. In addition, you have glory – harvested through simply being a good leader. It's the glory that makes the hero.

Glory fills a meter that allows your hero to level up and eventually enter Hero mode. The first time you use this 'special move' it feels completely wrong. For the duration of Hero mode you lose all control of the battlefield and are left entirely in control of whichever warlord it may be. By control we mean running at the enemy and rattling the mouse button as fast as possible to kill as many soldiers as you can with your allotted time. There's zero skill involved, it's essentially a bad version of *Dynasty Warriors*. The kind of game some ten year-old kid might create.

We shouldn't like Hero mode at all. The combat is laughable, the change in your hero's power when you are in control is immense and it has 'gimmick' stamped all over it. However, this is only a small feature of the gameplay and is something no other RTS offers. Wading into an enemy unit and swinging your sword wildly is a refreshing break from all the serious action. Not to mention the fact that you get to see how detailed the character models and environments are.

It's the small extra features like this that make *Rise & Fall* so much fun to play. The inclusion of

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CIVILISATIONS?
Four: Persia, Greece, Egypt and Rome.

Q. IS IT TRUE THAT DEVELOPMENT CHANGED HANDS?
Yes. The original developer Stainless Steel closed down while the game was in progress – Midway took over.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE MULTI-PLAYER?
Rise & Fall supports up to eight players across a network or LAN. There's even a team-based mode.

Harvest wood, gold and glory. Yes glory, an odd commodity but one that will earn you hero status.



See how detailed the character models and animations are.



FINGERPRINT

games™

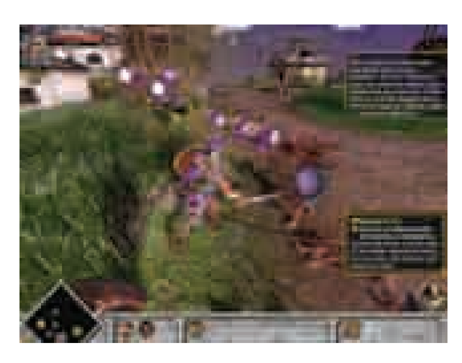
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HERO MODE: This is the first RTS that allows you to actually go right in and get your hands dirty.

WATERY GRAVE: Not only do you have land battles to worry about, but also you'll discover combat on the water.

ANIMAL CRUELTY

One great thing about being able to move the camera right down into the action is being able to see the small details – a chicken wandering about a town, for example. Of course the length of time between seeing this decorative piece of scenery and ordering one of your highly trained archers to launch a fiery arrow in its direction is pretty much nil. We were quite disappointed by our initial attempt as the first arrow didn't get the job done. The chicken made a break for it and fell as the second arrow struck home. Completely pointless but entertaining.



The camera will allow you to witness things you wouldn't normally see.

sea-based warfare was also very impressive. Like every other RTS, this gives you a variety of ground-based units to worry about, but to *Rise & Fall* you can now add naval warfare. It would've been easy for the developer to just make the boats into carrier vessels to move units from A to B, but their role is far more important. You can use them to train men, build siege units (onto the side of the ship), board or ram enemy boats and mount convincing attacks on strongholds from the water. And all of this works surprisingly well with the rest of the game; balancing is one area that cannot be faulted.

For something that starts off so basic, there are a lot of features to keep track of. Resources, buildings, military units, civilians, advisors, research, town management… It's as impressive as it is daunting. When a full-scale battle kicks off involving thousands of units, it can be difficult to keep up. Watching a screen full of your own units advance on an enemy position always leaves you wondering whether you've done enough. It's the 'have I left the kettle on', of videogames. Thankfully the controls are easy to understand.

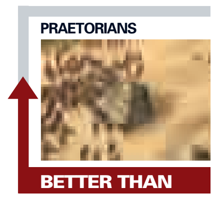
The battles themselves are as beautiful to watch as they are to orchestrate. Walls of soldiers clash, siege engines tear chunks from buildings, ladder crews scale city walls, archer units leave trails of fire in the sky. The Titan 2 game engine handles it all with consummate ease, regardless of how close in you move the camera. If this had the *Lord Of The Rings* licence stamped on it we'd have been in heaven (the Hero mode would certainly have been enjoyable).

The only trouble with the combat is that there didn't seem to be any benefit to unit formation. Where you position the units on the larger battlefield can make or break the battle, but when it comes to close-quarter skirmishes involving several units it can feel a bit random. You often have to sit back and hope that you come out better off. But then maybe that's what being a military leader is all about.

VERDICT 7/10

IMPRESSIVE RTS LOADED WITH FEATURES

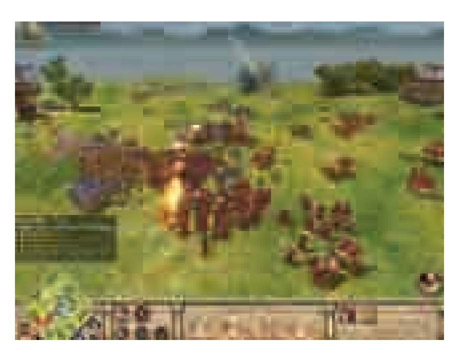
PRAETORIANS



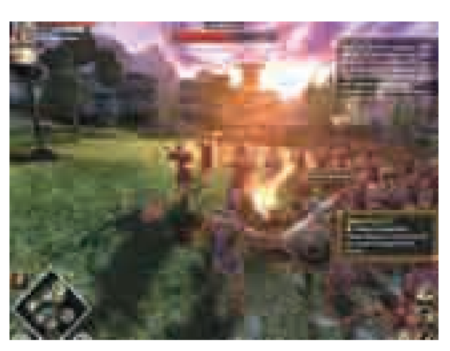
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

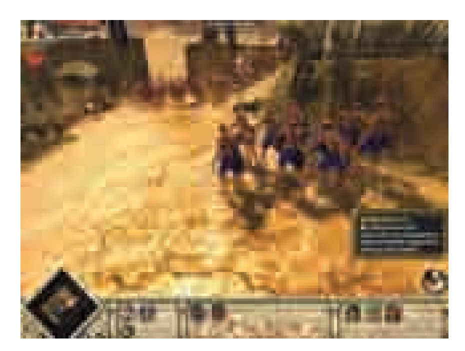
ROME: TOTAL WAR



The battles are enjoyable to watch whether on land or at sea.



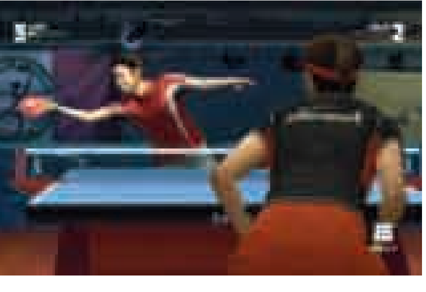
Hero mode lets you see the detail of something usually viewed from afar.



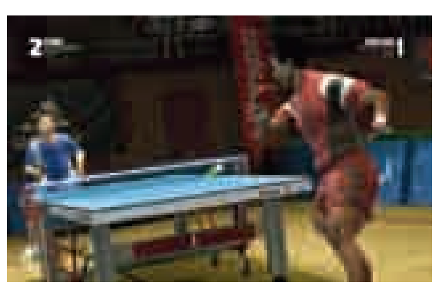
Villagers and slaves aren't that effective in combat.



Eleven characters, four women, a pleasing variety of countries of origin – what more could you want from a character selection?



Unsurprisingly enough, women tend to be that little bit faster but less powerful than the men.

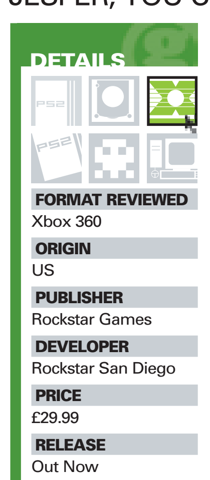


The game only actually looks like this when you use a Focus Shot and the event camera kicks in. Normally you have a more workable view.

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS

JESPER, YOU CHEATING ****

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games

DEVELOPER
Rockstar San Diego

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Although not what everyone expected from a Rockstar next-gen debut, *Table Tennis* really impressed us in its preview stages. Table tennis is tennis distilled to its purest form, speeded up and miniaturised, and Rockstar's loving recreation of the sport conveys that well. *Pong*, the last game that could even loosely be called a table tennis sim, might have captured the speed and competitiveness of an Olympic table tennis match, but *Rockstar Table Tennis* captures the polish and professionalism too. The Xbox 360 is home to a number of accomplished sports titles, however, and for this game to carve out its own niche it really needs to be more than just 'the only table tennis game in the market': it needs to offer something that other sports titles don't.

What *Table Tennis* delivers is a game that both conveys the speed and competitiveness of real table tennis while retaining an exciting, adrenaline-based arcade feel. It centres upon two players and a tiny ball bouncing very fast in a confined space, and manages to be both accurate and thrilling, balancing quick speed with a lot of technique. The four types of spin add a tactical element to proceedings, that really embellish matches, meaning that you can really see the difference between two amateurs having a rally and two experienced players sending the ball flying all over the place. *Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis* is definitely a multi-player-centric title; online or with a friend sitting next to you, the frenzy and competitive spirit of the game lead to some incredibly fierce contests. Because winning is a matter of fast reflexes over everything else, it's infinitely more satisfying to play a human opponent than it is to thrash an AI dummy.

The game lacks official sponsorship from any real-life players, but in a sport so relatively low-key that doesn't harm it as much as it might a court tennis game. It does, however, still exude professionalism. The game's indoor tennis stadiums, crowds and made-up players all feel as authentic as those of a fully licensed game, and the graphical style has a pleasing slickness to it. Each character has its own distinct playing style backed up by a personality – where the calm Chinese player Liu Ping wins matches with quiet triumph, Swedish powerhouse Jesper leaps around and shouts like a madman. You'll probably find yourself gravitating toward a particular player as their playing styles tend to be congruous with their mannerisms and you'll inevitably pick a favourite.

Indeed, all that the Single-Player mode really offers is a way of unlocking these varied characters. *Rockstar Table Tennis* is so very multi-player centred that in all honesty, the single-

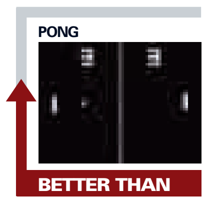
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CHARACTERS?
11, a good deal of whom are unlockable.

Q. WHO'S THE BEST?
Jesper, but he's also the worst. Cheating bastard.

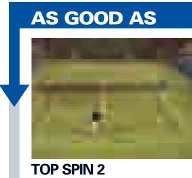
Q. ARE THE ACHIEVEMENTS EASY?
No. No, they are not. They are frustratingly obscure.

PONG



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



TOP SPIN 2

Don't look so glum, you're in a Rockstar game!

For some reason the eastern players seem to be far better at this tennis lark.

player is nothing more than a training mode. There are four tournaments – novice, medium, hard and expert – and a few very easy training exercises. There's no character development, no Career mode, not even any skill-enhancing mini-games. It certainly lacks the depth of something like *Top Spin 2*'s brilliant character-creation and Career mode, but arguably that's not what *Table Tennis* is about; it's an arcade game, essentially. Nonetheless, the lack of single-player depth does make it look a little shallow next to *Top Spin 2*, especially when its execution of table tennis itself sadly isn't as perfect as it might at first appear.

Table Tennis has one critical flaw, and that's that powerful characters have a distinct advantage over the others. Jesper, especially, seems ridiculously over-powerful. Because the ball moves so fast, human opponents simply don't have the time to press the buttons in time, and so it's much easier to catch someone out with a powerful player than it is with a more spin or speed-centric player. We also played all the way through the single-player tournaments with Jesper, from Normal right through to Expert, without losing a single game (except once in the semi-final of Expert mode against a rock-hard unlockable character). By contrast, when we went through Normal with another character, we came up against Jesper in our second or third match and there was nothing we could do to beat him. Although powerful characters always seem to have the upper hand, Jesper's advantage is almost insurmountable – we feel that a 'no-Jesper' rule will quickly emerge among more honourable online players.

Jesper aside though, powerful players' speed advantage is less pronounced and *Table Tennis* really shines as a videogame representation of the long-neglected sport that's both authentic and extremely fun. Multi-player especially makes it a cracking good tennis game – really, it's only the lack of single-player depth that ultimately lets it down. Sure to become a Live classic, *Table Tennis* is certainly not a disappointing next-gen debut for Rockstar; perhaps its exclusive branding will help it to shift a few extra copies from the shelves.

MISSING LINK

games™

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

GOING SOLO: The single-player really needs beefing up – admittedly this isn't a game with great depth, but some sort of solo endeavour would make the package more attractive.

VERDICT 7/10

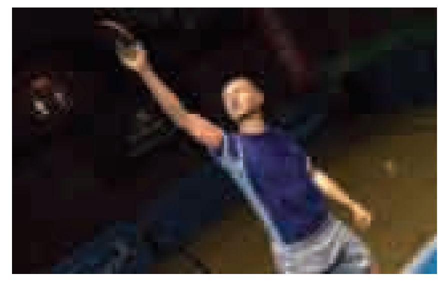
BALANCE ISSUES MAR A BRILLIANT TENNIS GAME

DO YOU LIKE MY SWEATER?

Aside from the Achievements, which are irritatingly obscure, *Table Tennis* also offers unlockable costumes, stadiums and, of course, players, but getting them is far from easy. The conditions for unlocking stadiums range from winning an ace against an opponent with a player from a specific country to simply winning games without losing a point, but there are a great many of these and their conditions just get more and more obscure as the game goes on. We reckon it will take even the sturdiest of achievement whores a long time to squeeze everything out of this game, even if only because it's so difficult to figure out what it wants from you.



Rockstar won't let us use our own shots, but normally you can actually see the table. These are all Event Camera shots.



Now that's what we call winning in style. Unlike Jesper. We hate Jesper.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

A WELCOME RETURN FOR EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE DUNGAREE LOVER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
30 June

PLAYERS
1-4

N*ew Super Mario Bros'* American release has been rated as 'E' for 'everyone', accompanied by a warning of impending 'comic mischief' for anyone who dives in. It's certainly one way of describing the senseless murder of countless turtles, fish and mushroom creatures. Jokes aside, the tag is a perceptive way to describe a *Mario* game – very little else gives you such an empowering sense of 'mucking about' as life in the little plumber's shoes. True to form, *New Super Mario Bros* does not disappoint anyone feeling particularly mischievous – or indeed comical – as Nintendo has crafted yet another sumptuous 2D platformer for the public's delectation.

The theme here is 'retro evolved'. It may come with the prefix 'new', but this long-awaited return to a flat-planed *Mario* is anything but. Instantly comparable to *SMB3*, its top down map is divided into eight themed worlds, and features hovering Hammer Bros, secret pathways and alternate routes aplenty. Those expecting an adventure similar in size to *Mario World* will be initially disenchanted, but it only takes a few hops and leaps in Mario land to rekindle the love.

This is due to the game's immaculate design. Hammering through the NES Mario games as a youngster it may have passed you by, but examining the planning and execution of every single level reveals how much thought goes into creating a 2D Mario game. Every coin, enemy, block and gap is placed with microscopic accuracy to allow skilled players a near-unhindered run through. It's so well done, so well hidden, as to feel completely natural – players won't even notice the subtle signposting. Only when going back through a level and seeing an arc of coins that pre-empts a forthcoming enemy attack, or the timing of a koopa's casual stroll which allows for a speedier pathway to the other side of a gap, does the ingenuity of design begin to shine. It may seem trite to dissect what is essentially a cartoon platformer, but these games didn't get this good by accident.

Nor, it would seem, did this DS incarnation. Not content with resting on its laurels, Nintendo has built Mario from polygonal building blocks while leaving the backgrounds 2D, meaning our hero's animation and personality take centre stage. Mario scoots around with humorous speedy little steps, lunges for walls when dropping short of a ledge and visibly punches overhead blocks. The redesign is a small touch, but one that actually impacts on gameplay: Mario is now considerably weightier than in the past, and momentum plays a greater part in skilful jumping. Fans may struggle with early stages, attempting and mis-timing micro accurate leaps, but an hour's play is all it takes to get re-accustomed, and platforming bliss is restored.

And how. Once again, a Mario game is blessed with a consistently fantastic level of imagination,

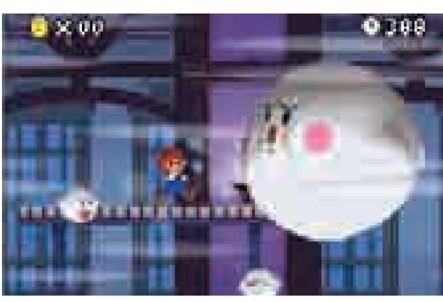
FAQs

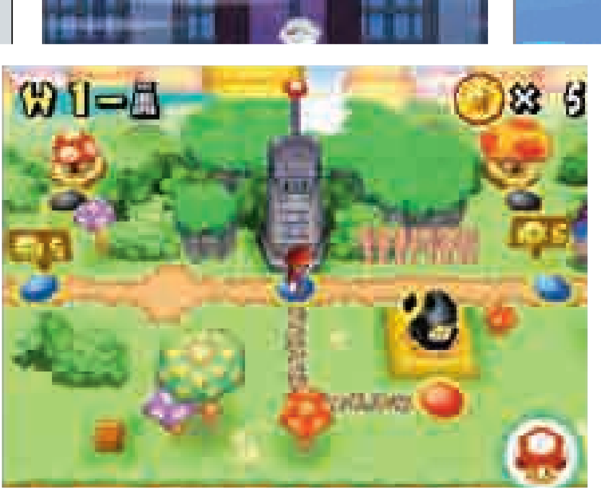
Q. WHAT'S THE SOUNDTRACK LIKE?
A little underwhelming actually – 'plinky plonky' is the phrase that springs to mind.

Q. WHAT'S THE STORY?
Have a guess…

Q. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO FINISH?
It can be hammered through in a few hours, but there's a chunk of secrets that you'll miss out on.

The visuals are lovely, although the art design of *Yoshi's Island* still pips it.



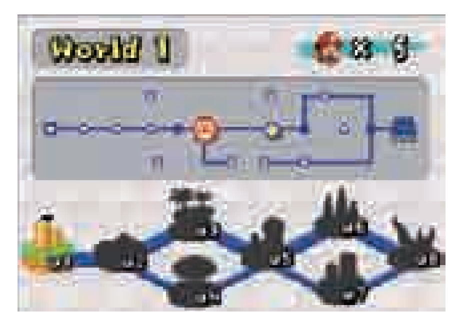




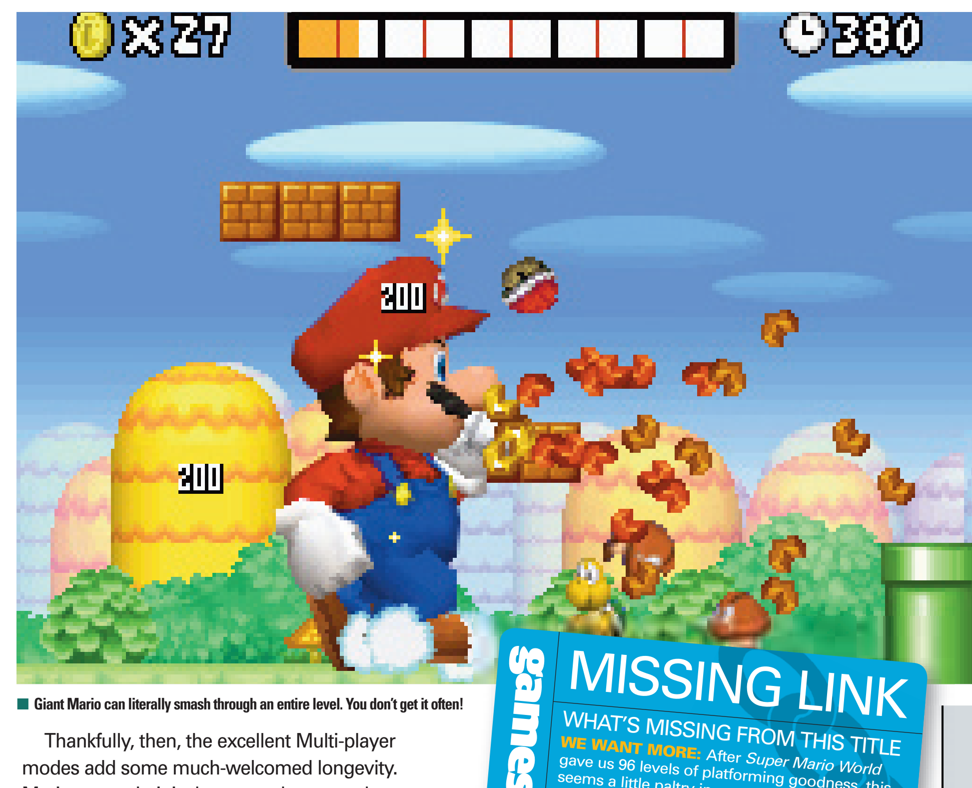
Each level contains three giant coins which can be exchanged for the right to take different routes in the overworld.

SPLIT DECISION

The route to the end of *New Super Mario Bros'* eight worlds may seem a little quicker than you might have expected as the path through the game forks at two points. Worlds four and seven are separated from the others, and only those with sufficient brainpower will be able to work out how to get there. It harks back to *Super Mario World's* numerous alternate routes and secret levels, and provides a significant amount of replay value to a title that is a little shorter than many would have liked. The overworlds themselves also contain numerous route choices and secret power-up paths, in classic Nintendo fashion.



■ As you can see, it's very similar to *Super Mario Bros 3* in structure.



■ Giant Mario can literally smash through an entire level. You don't get it often!

humour and surprise. The dancing toadstool platforms, the 'giant' Mario power-up – which sees our hero smashing through levels like the Incredible Hulk – the fact that you can turn into a spinning koopa shell… there are so many moments that will have you exclaiming 'genius' that it's almost unfair to the competition. Couple this with Mario's new batch of tricks borrowed from his adventures in the third dimension (wall leaps, 'bombshell' drop) and you're left with a technically marvellous platform game that more than does justice to its heritage.

This is why it's a near travesty that the whole thing is so short. Every aspect of *New Super Mario Bros* is so enjoyable that you can't help but clamour for another 96-level epic like *Super Mario World*, especially as seasoned Mario-ers will quite happily hammer through the bulk of the single player within a couple of days. While there are numerous secret levels, alternate paths (and even alternate worlds), it still falls some way short of the length many aficionados would like, us included.

Thankfully, then, the excellent Multi-player modes add some much-welcomed longevity. Mario versus Luigi – long overdue an update – has morphed into a frantic one-on-one race for stars, with the first to five winning. Of course, jumping on your opponent's head or hitting them with a well-placed fireball will cause them to lose a star, Sonic-rings style. As you can imagine, chaos ensues. Also, the inclusion of *Mario 64's* mini-games, with multi-player functionality, is a pleasing touch, especially with the expansion of Luigi's casino games.

It is a fantastic package, no doubt. Despite the single-player's unfortunate lack of length, and the ease with which many will speed through it, *New Super Mario Bros* is everything one could want from a return to 2D Mario. Inventive, charming, bright, bold and brilliant – it really is good to have the little fella back.

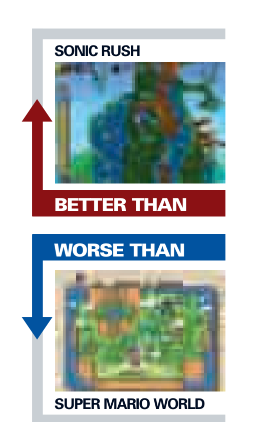


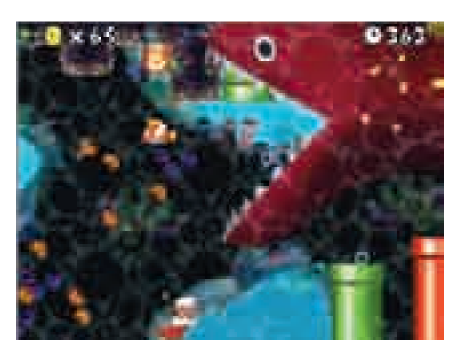
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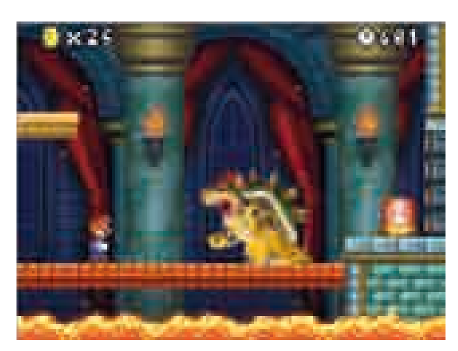
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

WE WANT MORE: After *Super Mario World* gave us 96 levels of platforming goodness, this seems a little paltry in comparison. You can't have too much of a good thing, after all.

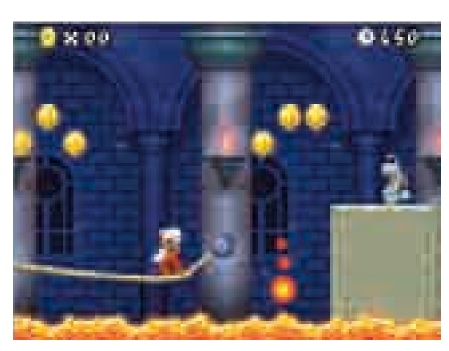




■ Sadly, a lack of length affects this terrific edition of Mario.



■ Fi fi fo fum, I smell the blood of a chubby little Italian man.

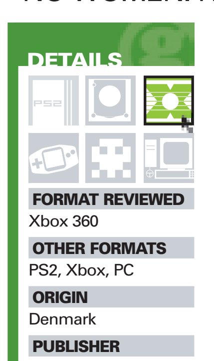


■ There are lava levels to contend with. It wouldn't be Mario without them.

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

"NO WOMEN. NO CHILDREN. THAT'S THE RULES"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
Denmark

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
IO Interactive

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

There's something unequivocally cool about hit men. Ever since Luc Besson's magnificent *Leon* turned Jean Reno into one of cinema's most fascinating leads, the idea of a cold, calculating contract killer is far more appealing than perhaps it should be. Aware of this, Denmark's IO Interactive has used this fourth instalment of the *Hitman* series to push Agent 47 ever closer to his inevitable calling as videogaming icon. The red tie, the bald head, the crisp suit… they all combine to give 47 a distinct identity, but the key to the series' success reaches far beyond his appearance. The beauty of *Hitman* is choice. You have the freedom to carry out a contract however you see fit – each level is a world of emergent murderous possibility. With *Blood Money*, IO has taken this core principle and developed it to the point that each mission has an almost overwhelming number of methods for the dispatching of one's targets. And that's not even including the 'last resort' option – straight third-person brutality.

The suburban mission provides an excellent example of just how much choice *Blood Money* players will have at their fingertips. 47 is tasked with covertly entering a known criminal's house during a child's birthday party. Heavy security guards the front door, cameras cover the side entrances and the FBI is monitoring the house from a van – so there's no way you can shoot your way in. A brief scout of the surrounding area throws up myriad prospects – do you 'off' the clown wandering about and walk straight through the front door? Place a pistol inside the caterer's crate, so he sneaks it past the guards, and then find it later? Poison the FBI's donuts, then start shooting? Dress as the pool boy and flirt with his wife? Climb a neighbour's tree house and snipe? There are countless more that never even crossed our minds. If you were interested, we strangled a security guard and snuck in the back door. Shortly after, our ingenious plan was scuppered when another guard found a suspicious bloodstain leading to a horrific chain of events including an executed clown and two dead bin men. We don't want to talk about it.

Of course, the true aim of *Hitman* is the 'perfect hit' – to enter a level, take out the targets and escape, all without being caught, and without a single extra casualty. *Blood Money* has upped the ante even further by allowing every level to be completed with all the deaths appearing as accidents. It's almost like a puzzle

FAQs

Q. ARE THERE ANY GOOD COSTUMES?
Chicken suits, Santa Claus get up, Clown outfits…

Q. ANY NEW WEAPONS?
Nothing major, but weapons can now be upgraded to within an inch of their lives.

Q. SO WHY 'BLOOD MONEY'?
It's what you get paid after each hit. Use it to buy intel, weapons and to bribe witnesses.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS



BETTER THAN

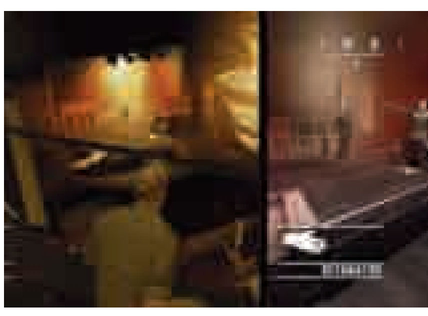
WORSE THAN



METAL GEAR SOLID 3



Ah, the inconspicuous appearance of a suited man with a shiny head. No one will notice him. Not on your nelly.



The picture-in-picture really opens up the gameplay, allowing for a more effective approach to each hit.



As ever, Agent 47's trusty sniper rifle can be carried around in a briefcase. Very cool.

game, trying to figure out what tricks 47 can pull to make everything seem like a 'series of unfortunate events', as it were. There's even more than one way of causing an accidental death per level. It's a magnificent achievement, going someway to explain *Blood Money's* lengthy development time and repeated delays.

The overall 'tightening' of every aspect of the game also offers some justification of where the game has been all this time. Previous *Hitmans* have suffered with inconsistent stealth parameters, ropey controls and engines that felt like they were struggling to cope with the sheer amount of activity in the levels. With *Blood Money*, IO has clearly taken on board the criticisms levelled at the predecessors, and ensured that players are always aware of what they can and cannot get away with. Being caught in restricted areas, for example, will initially cause a rise in the suspicion meter and an ejection by security.

The ingenious picture-in-picture cut-scenes show whenever a body has been discovered or a target is doing something significant, and while not entirely realistic – real hit men tend not to have the power of the third eye, after all – it adds immeasurably to the overall experience. Seeing a guard discover the stripped body of a colleague then contacting his friends – all while you're standing in the middle of a secure compound wearing the deceased's clothes – is supremely tense. The relief that accompanies a successful escape is tangible, and a strong indication of how immersive time spent in 47's shoes can be.

MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

SAVE ME: The fact that mid-level saves cannot be retrieved once the console is switched off is an unnecessary hindrance to progress.

It's by no means perfect, though. The lack of any physics of note (beyond the amusing ragdoll effects that have graced the series since *Silent Assassin*) means *Blood Money* feels very much 'last gen', even on 360 and PC, and there's still a jarring amount of glitching and clipping issues that deal verisimilitude a sturdy slap in the face. Also, despite IO Interactive's valiant efforts, moments will still arise when the suspicion meter will go through the roof for seemingly no reason at all, leaving the unwanted choice between a reload and a blood bath.

Even so, this is by far the finest *Hitman* yet. The level design is superb, the enemy AI is decent, and the story is suitably entertaining, which all captures the feeling of being a cold-blooded killer wonderfully. But so did the predecessors. And despite all of *Blood Money's* improvements, there's no escaping the fact that it IS just *Hitman*. And the game is engaging, compelling, immersive and thrilling with a twisted sense of morality and an even more twisted sense of humour. What more could you really ask for?

VERDICT 8/10

AGENT 47'S FINEST MOMENT TO DATE

The Mardi Gras mission displays *Dead Rising* levels of on-screen NPCs.

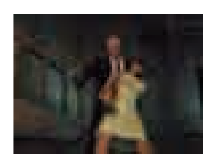
READ OR DEAD

One of *Blood Money's* finest innovations is the newspaper reports that segue the missions. Giving a detailed description of what happened at each crime screen, they double as a post-level deconstruction and a reinforcement of the game's internal logic. The more witnesses you alert and the more bodies and shells you leave behind leads to an increasingly accurate photofit of 47 adorning the front page. Make the hit look like an accident and leave no evidence, however, and the front page will be nothing more than an obituary.

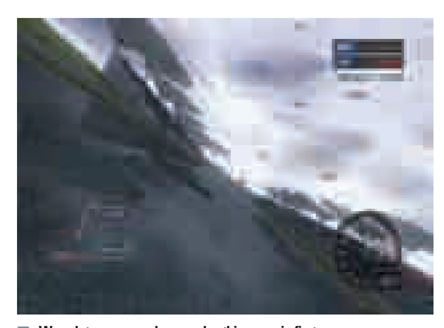


The newspapers between the levels are a superb touch, doubling as a post-mission briefing and a tangible reward for your skill (or lack of).

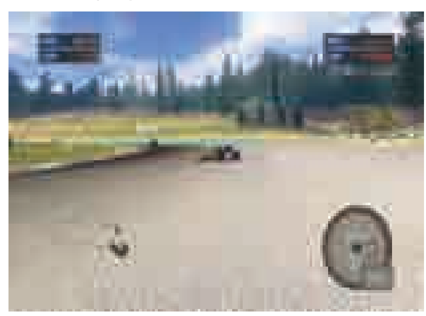
PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Clearly a last-gen game spruced up for the PC and Xbox 360. High definition adds little to the *Hitman* experience, so PlayStation2 owners should be more than pleased.



We salute anyone who can play this game in first-person. It is, one might say, a bit mental.



It's a case of crash or be crashed into.



Turning requires both analogue sticks AND braking. Early, early braking.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
TAKE ME ON: The online modes surpass the single-player options – everything from straight racing to trick matches to a King-Of-The-Hill mode where you own corners by taking them fastest.

MOTOGP '06

I DO MULTIPLE WHEELIES ON MY BIKE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
THQ
DEVELOPER
Climax
PRICE
£49.99
RELEASE
30 June
PLAYERS
1-4 (1-8 Online)

Unlike various other racing franchises, MotoGP tends not to be updated each year. Consequently, *MotoGP '06* is effectively two games in one as it incorporates the riders, teams, leathers and various nuances of both the 2005 and 2006 motorbike racing seasons.

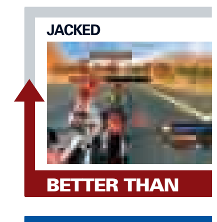
The game's attention to detail is impressive – each aspect of the motorsport is recreated faithfully, and the expansive single-player Career mode is so comprehensive it's daunting. You can edit every aspect of your bike and rider, choosing from an array of licensed logos, models, leathers and anything else you can think of. You can even create your own imagery if you so wish. Bikes can be manually tuned for different weather conditions and specific tracks if you know what you're doing, and, of course, the entire range of motorcyclists from the MotoGP season is available to unlock and play. For serious fans of the real-life sport, this could not possibly be better in terms of the accuracy of its presentation.

The way it plays is also true to the real world. *MotoGP* will be pretty difficult to master for those without a good understanding of the sport, but the controls feel very realistic and responsive once you settle into them. This realism may be the only thing preventing you from enjoying the game; it is very unforgiving and requires extensive track-learning and perfect accuracy of control especially on the harder difficulties. This is a simulation more than a representation of motorbike racing, and so gamers with only a passing interest in the sport may find it too hard to get into. It takes dedication to get the most out of *MotoGP '06*, but those with the motivation to persevere are rewarded with a huge array of unlockables, character improvement points and, of course, Achievements.

Online, the game is bound to attract a faithful community of hardcore motorbike enthusiasts. The customisation factor coupled with the huge array of match types available online (as well as the great potential for downloadable content) will ensure its popularity on Live.

MotoGP '06 has pretty much everything a bike racing fan could want from a MotoGP game. Its realistic handling, plethora of customisation options and fidelity to the licence may, however, go unappreciated by the greater public, which sadly limits its appeal. Nonetheless, this is a satisfyingly realistic and detailed racing simulation, and if you have the motivation to get accustomed to its ruthlessly realistic controls it will last you a very long time.

VERDICT 7/10
SOLID, IN-DEPTH, BUT A LITTLE IMPENETRABLE

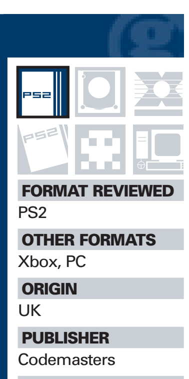

JACKED
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

TOURIST TROPHY

FROM THE SENSIBLE TO THE SILLY

SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006



FORMAT REVIEWED
PS2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
Tower Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
1 July

PLAYERS
1-4

The quality of *Pro Evo* has seen it go almost unchallenged as the finest football game on the market. Generations of gamers have grown up with this knowledge, and despite EA's consistently adequate *FIFA* franchise this looks unlikely to change. If you were born before the mid-Eighties however, you're likely to have grown up in a world where at the top of the pile was the one and only *Sensible Soccer*.

There was little competition, but the sheer blinding quality of the *Sensible* experience saw it quickly rise to ubiquity. The speedy play, outrageous shots and primitive graphics may bear little resemblance to the realist approach of modern football titles, but in terms of addictive fun *Sensible Soccer* has barely aged a day.

Remaking anything is risky – there's always a vitriolic hardcore wanting to preserve the sanctity of the original – but remaking something as unique as *Sensible Soccer* almost guarantees unfavourable comparisons. While negativity surrounding updated classics is inevitable, with *Sensible Soccer 2006* they're actually justified.

Tower Studios has tried to capture *Sensi's* knockabout spirit – the speed, dribbling ability and after-touch are all satisfyingly familiar – but paltry new elements detract from what was already a winning formula. The cell-shaded characters are as ugly as the originals were charming, while the addition of a directional arrow undermines the gameplay. Giving the arrow that vital second to keep up with the constantly changing direction of play is difficult with a game that moves quickly – the ball often finishes up in the stands. This is a baffling addition to a control method that has otherwise been left untouched.

Sensi 2006 is all too simplistic – the traditional two-button control method is too limiting, and the game would have benefited from the inclusion of *SWOS's* excellent management mode. It seems afraid to use the extra power available to it for fear of corrupting the legacy of its predecessors, and becomes more a pastiche than a true update. The triumph of the original was that it recognised the strengths and weaknesses of its platform and played to them perfectly, leaving little room for improvement. *Sensible Soccer 2006* does not subscribe to this ethos, opting instead for a nostalgia trip which is fine when mixed with a few friends and some alcohol, but too shallow to sustain the interest of the solitary, sober gamer.

VERDICT 5/10
ILL-CONCEIVED REMAKE OF AN EVERGREEN CLASSIC

THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



Just like you remember it, only a lot worse. *Sensible Soccer 2006*, ladies and gentlemen.



Player graphics and animations are too limited and unsightly to make any visual impact.



The game has 5,500 unique players to control. We believe this is Michael Owen.

NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

JAPAN AND KOREA UNITE TO DELIVER ON AN XBOX PROMISE (AND FAIL)

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Korea/Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Phantagram/
Q Entertainment

PRICE
¥6,800

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Bigger is better. That's why Microsoft designed the Xbox 360 to be five times the size of the Wii, right? And more is better, too, which is why Phantagram decided to draw thousands of characters on screen simultaneously in its first 360 title. So is *Ninety-Nine Nights* actually better than all other hack 'n' slash games? In a word, no.

N3 (as it would like to be called) begins confidently. A dramatic CG cut-scene introduces the game's main playable characters as they fend off hundreds of Tolkien-esque monsters. The surprise comes when, beyond the CG and the pretty menu screens, *N3*'s in-game graphics successfully assert the same kind of epic quality. No question: *Ninety-Nine Nights* is a beautiful game. The animation of those enemy hordes excepted, *N3* is so polished it shines. And the game's seven playable characters are particularly well defined.

Your adventure begins in control of just one character – Inphyy, a blonde lass with sassy dress sense and a long sword. Her story is explained in brief through another cut-scene before her first mission, although *N3*'s manual provides more background. Essentially, despite Tetsuya Mizuguchi's claims that the story is central to the experience, *N3* actually makes only passing reference to why things are happening. There's a cut-scene at either end of each character's quest, bookending the massive battles which take place in between and nothing more.

This is an action game at heart. Although battles are fought in huge open spaces the gameplay is tight and simple. X, Y and B are used for standard and special attacks, while A performs a jump and the R trigger is used to dash. There's no need to equip weapons or make great tactical decisions because what you can do is based purely on which items you happen to pick up, which level your character is at (even level-ups are automatic) and how you use *N3*'s combo system.

The most enjoyable aspects of the game are its facility for mad combos and screen-smashing special attacks. Even with standard attacks you can score four-figure kill counts and combos. The trick is to keep moving in different directions, planning your next attack as you make this one, and always looking for the stray enemy soldier hiding in the midst of your own incompetent troops.

The same principle applies when using special attacks. Specials are powered by collecting orbs from the enemies you've chopped down,

FAQs

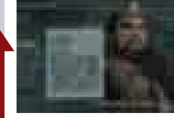
Q. SO IS N3 KOREAN OR JAPANESE?
Raised in Korea, but one of its parents (Mizuguchi) is Japanese and some of that parent's friends (Q Entertainment) helped out with buying rusks.

Q. NO MULTI-PLAYER?
Alas, no. There's the potential for two-player action, but perhaps that feature is being held over for a sequel.

Q. HAS N3 BEEN A HIT IN JAPAN?
It sold 26,000 copies for the 360 in its first week, but compared with the dozen other format games which charted higher in that first week: it's not been a big hit.



DYNASTY WARRIORS 5: EMPIRES

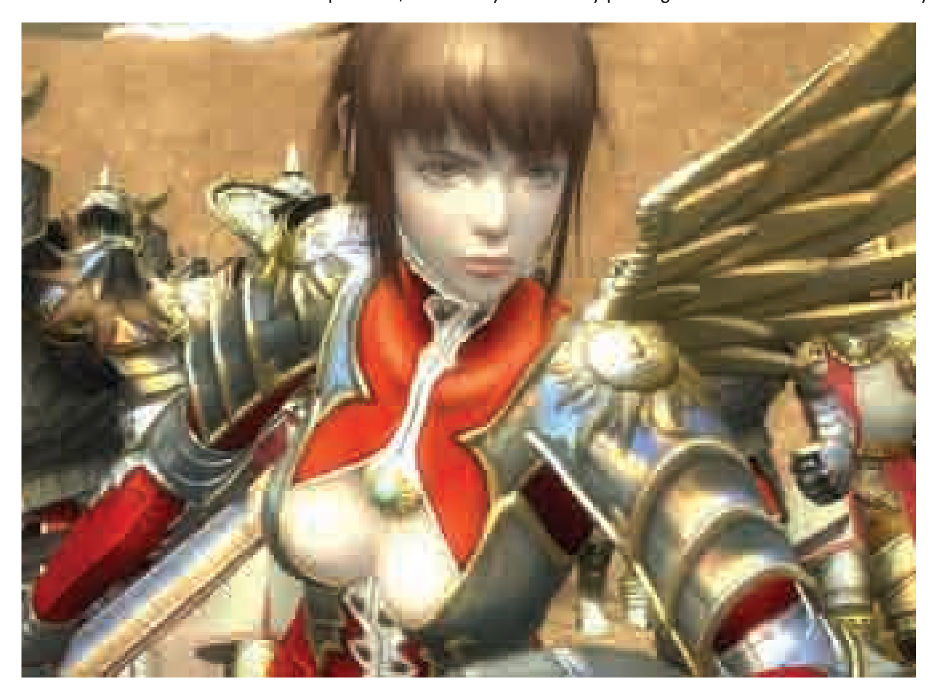


ON A PAR WITH

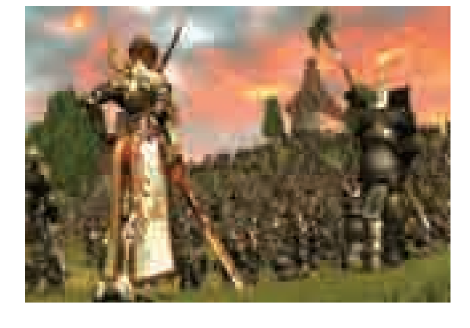
WORSE THAN



OTOGI



The camera pans to a low view of the action if you want it to. Camera control on the right analogue stick is perfectly implemented.





Make a special attack and the screen trips out to blazing glory like this. The blurred trail effects are moisturiser for the eyes.



When the going gets tough *N3*'s soldiers stand around waiting for direction. This is the game's accidental '*Blackadder* touch'.

which are filtered into a magic meter. When the meter tops out you can unleash a spectacular attack which again is built around a succession of multi-directional sword strikes. Specials tend to last only ten seconds or so, but during that time it's possible to cull many hundreds of enemies. And the clever bit? While you're busy causing mass carnage on a burning screen, blue orbs for every victim power a separate meter which, when full, can be used to effect an even more special attack. *N3* gets these things so very right that it's just about possible to forgive its flaws. But, oh, those flaws…

The first time things go wrong is the first time you die – and vice versa. Because there are no checkpoints and no save options mid level, death means you have to start over from the mission's outset. If each mission was a five-minute blast that would be okay, but even the shortest of *N3*'s stages weighs in at around 20 minutes. It's not so much an oversight on the developer's part as it is an insult.

Then there's the game's Artificial Unintelligence to consider. Although you only have control of a single lead character at any one time, battles are fought between armies. At your side is an army of drone soldiers who deserve a place on *M*A*S*H*. When a lone soldier from the enemy gets caught in amongst your supporting battalions, invariably they opt to execute him by waiting. There is comical value in *N3*'s backward AI, but just occasionally some real assistance would be appreciated. In fact there doesn't seem to be much reason for the supporting armies' presence – they offer no support.

Technical faults also impact on the action. There are instances of slowdown in later parts of the game, but those problems are nothing compared with *Ninety-Nine Nights'* dubious collision detection. Monsters don't always receive the blows you aim, while hundred-strong armies seem like huge masses of bodies and it can be difficult to understand where your attacks are making real impact. Particularly during end-of-quest boss fights, when boss characters become unreasonably difficult to actually damage, the developer's rough work is aggravating.

Most of the time *Ninety-Nine Nights* does look like a game which befits the 'next-gen' tag, and yet periodically it embarrasses itself with 'previous-gen' foibles. Playing *N3* is a frustrating experience. The concept is sound, and the combo system is especially enjoyable. Ultimately, though, the game is not fine-tuned and, worse, annoying glitches somehow eluded Phantagram's QA team and infiltrated the final code. For shame.

games™ MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

EASY DOES IT: The lack of selectable difficulty levels is a letdown. You can replay stages to up your ranking, but it would be cool to have the choice of tougher versions of some levels.

VERDICT 5/10

NEEDS WORKING ON FOR ANOTHER HUNDRED DAYS

LEVEL PLAYING FIELDS

In *Ninety-Nine Nights*' favour, its level design is fresh – the structure is *not* one of its frustrating points. Although you're given a map at the start of each mission, it's rarely necessary. Mostly, through intuition or common sense, the flow of play is directed by advancing enemies and the natural lie of the terrain. It's linear without being restrictive. Links between levels are map-based: the game is spread out across seven characters whose individual quests contain several missions. It all unfolds smoothly. Unfortunately it takes only 15 hours to fully unfold.



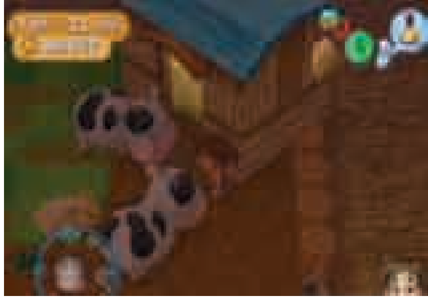
"See those windmills on yonder hill?" *N3*'s countryside has some vague connection with the world of Don Quixote.



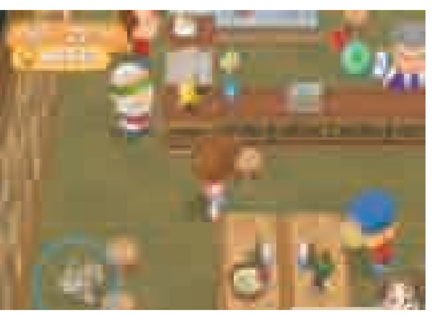
N3's cut-scenes are beautiful. Its lead characters are beautiful. Its flaws are ugly as hell.



Nothing better than a little fishing after a hard day on the farm. You'll have to be dedicated as upgrading your rod depends on how many fish you catch.



Calling the animals in at night protects them from wild dogs. It also gives you a sense of power as they all tramp indoors at the ring of your bell.

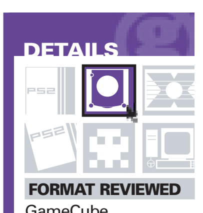


Ah, the pub after a long day's work – something we can all relate to.

HARVEST MOON: MAGICAL MELODY

THE BEST 3D HARVEST MOON YET

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Natsume

DEVELOPER
Marvelous Interactive

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
Q2 '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Cautious *Harvest Moon* fans may be instinctively wary of *Magical Melody*, assuming it to be an update of the disappointing earlier GameCube title, *A Wonderful Life*. It is not. *Magical Melody* is an entirely different game, one that thankfully bears much more of a resemblance to the exemplary Game Boy Advance title *Friends Of Mineral Town* than to the refreshingly different but ultimately diluted *Harvest Moon* experience that *A Wonderful Life* offered. It's closer to the top-down view of the portable games, playing similarly and with the same alluring qualities. What it adds to the formula, though, is a sense of structure that augments the game's typical expansiveness and makes this perhaps the most accessible and most likeable *Harvest Moon* game yet made.

Magical Melody feels more structured because you have definite goals. It actually has a story, for one thing. The Harvest Goddess has turned to stone, and, by working hard to revitalise the town and its inhabitants and restore belief in her, your farmer can rescue her. Certain achievements and actions – working in the rain, brushing your animals, shipping certain items – yield musical notes, which together make up the Magical Melody that will re-awaken her. These points act as both reward and incentive, and their variety and unpredictability often raise a smile. You also have a direct farming rival in the village, who is also out to save the goddess, which gives you something to compete against, and a reason to strive for success past the base addictiveness of the game.

Bizarrely, though, *Magical Melody's* feeling of structure is offset by a greatly increased element of choice. You get to choose, first, whether to play as a boy or a girl, which is more



FAQs

Q. RIGHT, WHAT CAN I BREED?
Cows, sheep, chickens, horses (as many as you like if you want to make a fortune on the race track) – you also have a dog and a pig as pets.

Q. WAS THAT TEN POTENTIAL SPOUSES?
Yes, ten. Seducing them even earns you musical notes, which we found quite amusing.

Q. WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE NOTES?
Well, they re-awaken the Harvest Goddess, but really they're just nice little rewards.

■ Musical notes are presented to you for all sorts of things, some more predictable than others.

important than it might appear – *Harvest Moon* is famously a series that attracts more female attention than it does male, and fans of the finer sex will doubtless be relieved that they won't have to shell out for the 'For Girls' version in a year or so in order to play as their own gender. Perhaps more significantly, you also get to select which plot of land you'd like to buy rather than being lumbered with some distant relative's forgotten ranch on the outskirts of town. You can buy additional land and structure it as you like, perhaps residing in the centre of town and building chicken coops and cow sheds out toward the sea.

Your farmer actually lives among his (or her) neighbours for a change, and is responsible for the whole community rather than just his own farm – the way you conduct your business directly affects the village, causing additional characters to move in, and sparking rivalries both business and personal. *Magical Melody* is considerably less isolated and more engaging than either *A Wonderful Life* or *Friends Of Mineral Town*, and we prefer it that way.

On top of this improvement, the game also has a sense of streamlining and refinement. Stylistically, everything works perfectly, with huge happy-looking cows, cute little villagers and much better animation than that of *A Wonderful Life*. There are also a number of changes to the formula that make everything a bit easier: a set of reins to lead individual animals, for instance, and a recipe book that means you no longer have to waste precious produce experimenting in the kitchen, as well as a clearly visible stamina bar that plays an important part and lets you see exactly how close you are to exhaustion after a long, hard day.

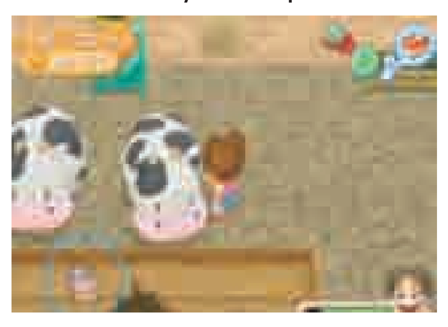
There are things to do in the village besides tending the farm – stopping off at the nearby café for lunch, or going mining, fishing, making eyes at the local bachelors and bachelorettes (there are ten for each sex, plus a few secret ones – a quite daunting amount of choice compared to *Mineral Town*'s eight and *A Wonderful Life*'s, er, three). Farming feels like your character's day job rather than the entire point of its existence – there's more scope to, well, just chill out and enjoy the company of the varied and friendly villagers. There's the little things, too, like the comprehensive status screens that make everything so much easier to navigate, and the button that lets you see the names of people and animals (and whether they've been fed).

Is *Magical Melody* the best *Harvest Moon* game yet? That comes down to personal preference – some will still feel that the series loses something when it's not portable. It's definitely the best home-console game in the series, and the extra depth and involvement that it brings to the table will be irresistible to *Harvest Moon* fans. Indeed, for followers of the series, this is an essential purchase; it's everything that we've always wanted a *Harvest Moon* game to be.

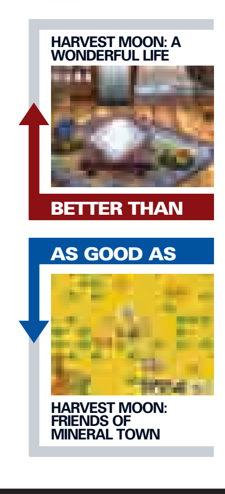
VERDICT 8/10
A BRIGHT AND BUOYANT RETURN TO FORM

MARRIED LIFE

As always, the pace of life is leisurely – you won't even think about getting married until your second or third game year (a year took us, oh, about four days of pretty solid play – so a little slower than usual). When you do, though, there's certainly no lack of choice. Although it's not as family-centric as *A Wonderful Life* – in which your child's prospects were more important than farming – there's still an emphasis on marrying. Most festivals are centred around couples, and you can even start fights if you have more than one potential spouse interested in you. And, as always, you'll have to beat a rival suitor to win your desired partner's affection.



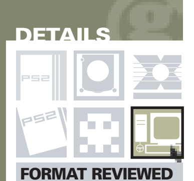




HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC V

SEDUCTIVE AS A SUCCUBUS; MIGHTY AS A PALADIN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Russia

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Nival Interactive

PRICE
£34.99
(Deluxe Edition: £39.99)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 with Network and Internet multi-player

MIN SPEC
1.5GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 2GB HD

"And don't forget to throw that bloody ring in the volcano before we go!"

Turn-based strategies on the PC suffer from a bit of an image problem. They tend to be horribly ugly, overly complicated, or both. Even the acronym 'TBS' doesn't trip as easily off the tongue as their real-time counterpart the RTS. Indeed, set a turn-based strategy in a fantasy universe, and a game runs the risk of becoming so impenetrable that only the most hardcore of geeks will brave playing it. While you could accuse the first four titles in the *Heroes Of Might And Magic* series of having graphics that would peel paint from a wall at ten paces and a management system so complicated that you need an MBA from Harvard to play the game, you certainly can't say the same for the series' latest incarnation.

It's no exaggeration to say that *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* may very well be the prettiest turn-based strategy ever made. The game looks stunning at every level, from the town management screens and the strategic map, right down to the tactical arena, where the level of attention to detail in everything from the spectacular spell effects to the wrinkled faces on pot-bellied peasants is most obvious. Textures are as varied as they are vibrant, while character models are beautifully defined and exquisitely animated. Equal attention has been paid to the sound effects, with everything from the jingling of chain mail to the mocking laughter of comely succubi having the exact resonance you'd imagine them to. With such sharp presentation, it's all too easy to be sucked into the game and then wallow in its high fantasy atmosphere; indeed, the game is undoubtedly the most accessible turn-based strategy on PC for years.

Pleasingly, the six single-player campaigns are linked by an overarching narrative that manages to tell a coherent story despite the shifts in focus from one faction to another as the campaigns wear on. Characterisation of the story's protagonists is strong throughout, though the cut-scenes occasionally suffer from a rogue mis-spelling in the subtitling and some of the voiceover work is a tad laboured. It doesn't detract too much from the overall experience, however, and the cut-scenes still provide suitably dramatic interludes, as the latest twist to the plot is revealed.

Compared to other titles in the genre, *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* has had its management model pared down to the bare essentials. Town management is simplicity itself and the acquisition of resources determined either by ownership of the appropriate buildings (such as sawmills for wood, or caves for crystals) or, if your town has a

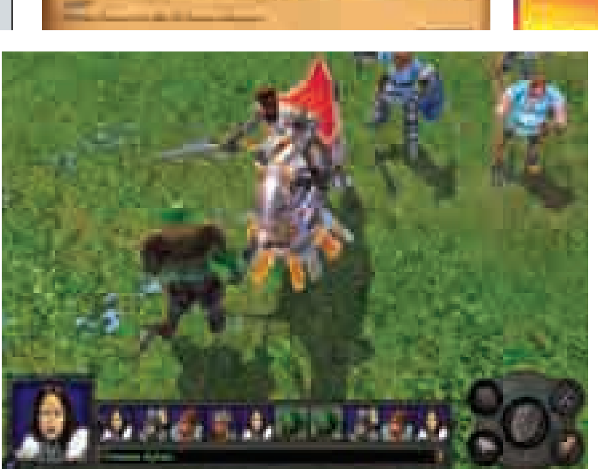
FAQs

Q. A LONG CAMPAIGN?
Yes indeed, there are 30 campaign missions in total, with some taking between four and eight hours to complete.

Q. ANY MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS?
Everything from hot-seat play on a single PC to LAN and Internet play is catered for.

Q. WHAT DOES MY EXTRA FIVER BUY?
The Deluxe Edition includes three extra scenario missions plus a copy of *Heroes Of Might And Magic II*.







This guy might be a touch evil, though we're not sure what tipped us off…

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

PRETTY POLY: The move to genuine 3D makes the game much more atmospheric than its predecessors, and the quality of the unit models and environmental textures is astounding.

Putting the griffin into The Griffin Empire.

marketplace, exchanging surplus resources of one type for the one you need. Recruitment of troops is limited to a set number per week, with each unit type having its own prerequisite building that must be present in the town before they can be inducted into your hero's army.

Combat has likewise been streamlined to ensure a brisk pace. While there is theoretically no limit to the amount of troops a hero may have in their force, there is a restriction on the number of unit types (a maximum of seven) that they can take into battle. With all the troops of a specific unit type acting at the same time, this stops battles turning into marathons even when army sizes stretch into four figures on each side. Combat is driven by the initiative values of units, with the troops having the highest initiative and morale acting most frequently. The unit types available to each faction are delicately balanced, though there is nothing to stop a hero from using troops from an opposing faction if they can occupy one of their towns or recruitment facilities.

It's just as well that combat is kept relatively swift given just how often you'll be riding into battle. With the armies of opposing factions roaming the maps, as well as static clusters of enemies guarding resources or being spawned as time passes by within missions, the lion's share of your time in game will be spent on the tactical map. So it's mildly disappointing then that the AI is a little one-dimensional and lacks the ruthlessness of other turn-based strategies. The campaigns do get progressively tougher as you get deeper into the game, but this can be down more to the



weight of numbers the enemy has, than their tactical finesse.

Despite this, the game is still a tremendous amount of fun and the single-player campaigns will require a huge investment of time (easily a hundred hours or more) if you ever want to see the conclusion of the story. However, *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* does have a distinct whiff of compromise about it. By making the game more combat-orientated than management-orientated, and by increasing the emphasis on spectacle to a degree that shames most first-person shooters, *Heroes Of Might And Magic V* has sufficient appeal to become an entry point into the genre for the mainstream player, at the price of not quite having sufficient subtlety and depth to completely satisfy its natural target audience: the lesser spotted geek.

VERDICT 7/10

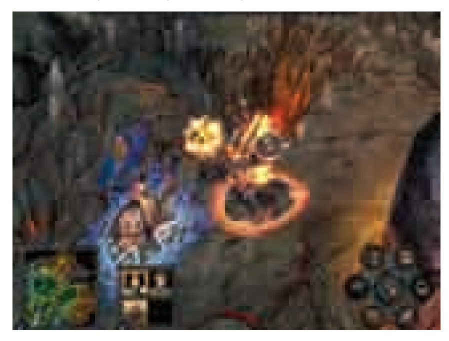
BEAUTIFUL AND COMPELLING, BUT SLIGHTLY SHALLOW

KICK CUIRASS

If you want to make life easier for your Heroes, you can search out ancient artefacts hidden around the campaign maps. While these items usually have powerful guardians, the reward of a Dwarven Cuirass that gives your defence stat a +4 bonus, a sword that adds a +2 bonus to your Attack rating, or a set of boots that boosts your Hero's movement rate is easily worth the trouble. On certain maps, you may even be able to purchase these artefacts from vendors, but before you hand over all that gold, bear in mind that you only get to use items for the mission you buy them on.



Here be dragons… though not for long.

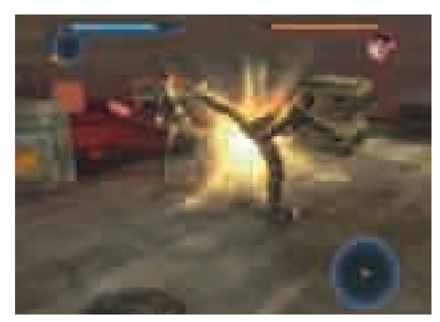


The strategic map is exquisitely detailed. The flames boiling off this arch devil are beautifully animated.





It may not look great, but this looks a lot better than it actually is.



Lady Deathstrike makes an amazing recovery from being full of metal.



BAMF! The sound Nightcrawler makes as he teleports – and also the sound of any hope we had of *X-Men: The Official Game* being any good vanishing.

games™ MISSING LINK

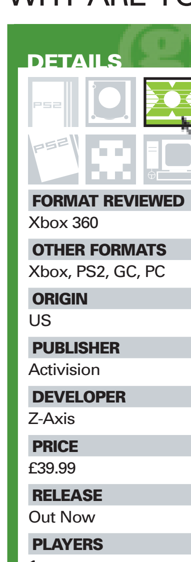
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

RIGHTING WRONGS: The *Marvel* world is pretty hefty, and with so many stories and heroes a bad game shouldn't really happen. More effort where it matters is what we want to see here.

X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO US?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PS2, GC, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Z-Axis

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

When a new generation of consoles is unveiled, it's difficult to keep expectations from soaring. Promises of bigger and better things are made constantly, and so far the Xbox 360 line-up has managed to live up to the expectations heaped upon it. But we all knew the cracks would show eventually. Enter *X-Men: The Official Game*.

When accurately describing videogames, we tend to use the word 'dross' rarely, but this particular *X-Men* title has forced the word from us in a spectacular fashion. The reason? We've been replaying – and hating – this same game each time a studio fails to show any passion for what it's creating, and pushes a generic third-person adventure from the mill. While we should be in a place where boundaries are being stretched, worthless cash-ins are still appearing.

You get to play as Wolverine, Nightcrawler and – wait for it – the mighty Iceman as they fight, teleport and slide through lots of not-good-enough stages. It's hard to continue from here as the game's lack of originality or innovation has stifled our creativity, and presented a lack of topics to comment upon. Suffice to say it doesn't look good enough for the Xbox 360, doesn't contain enough to warrant your money, and generally doesn't play well enough to be considered a 'game'.

We'd like to believe that the expectations for the console are responsible for the dross on show, but tedium at this level hasn't been acceptable on any format for 15 years now, and when the continuous sound of Wolverine's three four-hit combos are being drowned out by snorts of disapproval and wails of frustration, you know you have something 'special' on your hands.

That you're provided with a story touted as the link between the second and third films perhaps gives fans a reason to play, and Nightcrawler's absence from the third movie is explained beyond that which is probably true – that The Beast's inclusion would have upped the blue mutant count to three, and someone in a nice suit patronisingly deemed it 'too confusing' to have Cummings' character reappear. In reality, these somewhat ropey reasons to play are rendered null, and persistence is rewarded only by an ending that provides a sense of relief, as well as a scrolling list of people's names – each of whom we feel a little embarrassed for.



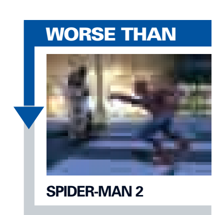
VERDICT 3/10
COMIC IN MANY WAYS

FANTASTIC 4



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



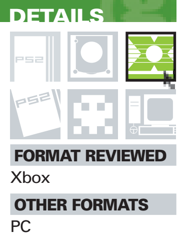
SPIDER-MAN 2



WHEN IS A GAME NOT A GAME?

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
Switzerland

PUBLISHER
Empire

DEVELOPER
Funcom

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

D*reamfall* is best described as contemporary interactive storytelling, rather than as a game. It bears more of a resemblance in terms of structure and feel to *Shenmue* than its predecessor (also called *The Longest Journey*) which was considered one of the best adventure games ever. It's no longer just point-and-click – set ten years after *The Longest Journey*, *Dreamfall* puts you in direct control of your characters – both on the PC and Xbox – and it feels more immediate for it. The simple, sporadic combat, means it isn't an action-adventure game either. This is a unique title that first and foremost is a compelling, well-told piece of sci-fi; its merits as a game are ultimately secondary to its masterful storytelling.

Thankfully, *Dreamfall* doesn't assume that you've already played *The Longest Journey* and been waiting six years for a sequel, although you're likely to enjoy it more if you have. It begins with a new protagonist and a new tale – only later do the characters and plot of the original begin to seep into this new adventure. What begins as a futuristic mystery soon develops into a multi-layered story that mixes fantasy, science fiction and contemporary storytelling with an impressive degree of believability. Multiple threads of intrigue drive the player, quite willingly, toward the game's bleak conclusion.

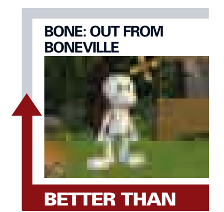
Beyond the story, *Dreamfall* is strangely shallow. Adventure-game item puzzles and other traditional staples pop up – most of the time, you're eased from location to location to forward the story with minimum fuss. The combat, when it appears, is basic, and if you get stuck it probably won't be for long. This isn't a traditional adventure game, but it's not any other type of game either; it feels like an interactive movie, and though by no means a bad thing it does leave the actual gameplay lacking in depth.

If it's complex, compelling narrative that you're after, then *Dreamfall* will not disappoint. Its shortcomings as a game don't detract from its significance as interactive fiction, but it may well deter gamers without the inbuilt patience and sophistication that adventure-game fans tend to be favoured with. Enjoyed for what it is, this is bold and compelling – it draws from the traditional and the contemporary to deliver a uniquely modern and elegantly told adventure.



VERDICT 7/10
GREAT STORY, GOOD GAME

BONE: OUT FROM BONEVILLE



BETTER THAN

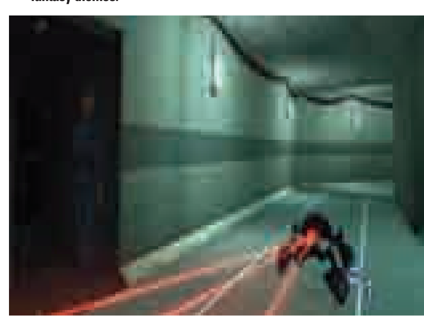
WORSE THAN



ANKH



The accomplished plot leaps skilfully between science fiction and fantasy themes.



There are some dreaded stealth sections, but these do actually add to the atmosphere.



There are multiple characters – we won't ruin anything by mentioning the others – and multiple dimensions to play with.



They're much more enthusiastic in the cut-scenes than they are in the game, we can tell you.



You'll be seeing this particular screen very, very infrequently on Normal or above.



This move is more complex than others. It involves jumping and then pressing Y.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CHOOSE YOUR EMPIRE: It's the same. It's EXACTLY THE SAME as *DW5* and *Xtreme Legends*. It has an expanded Empires mode that doesn't mean anything. That's it.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5: EMPIRES

X, X, X, Y, X, X, X…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Koei

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
23 June
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

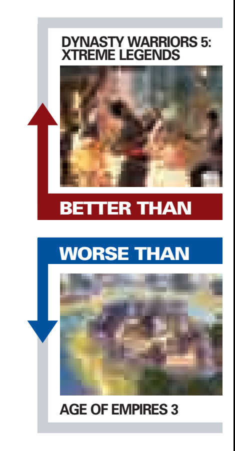
***Dynasty Warriors* sells by the bucketload in Japan.** Sadly, this makes it unlikely that Koei will stop making them anytime soon. *Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires* features the same falsifications of the same battles and heroes in Chinese history, the same hack-and-slash battling, the same irrelevant array of statistics as it always has. The difference is that Empires mode has been expanded, which does add something to the game. Managing an empire provides much-needed relief from pressing X and Y, but it's just a way to fill up the time between the never-changing battles.

As always, it's a race to see who can hack their way through to the enemy main camp first, capturing smaller sites on the way. Mindless, one-hit-kill AI soldiers led by ridiculously powerful generals march upon you while you lead an equally mindless horde against them (if you're lucky – usually they just stand uselessly about, no matter what you order them to do). Set the game to Novice or Easy and it's quite inoffensive – you press X until everything is dead, and the crippling lack of complexity or skill in the fighting doesn't affect you too much. On Normal or above, though, the game is just hideously frustrating as well as depressingly basic.

When facing powerful enemies, the shallow fighting system really grates because it's a matter of trading combos until one of you falls over, and nine times out of ten, that will be you. Characters can now only block directly in front of themselves; fine for one-on-one battles, but those simply don't exist in *Dynasty Warriors*. As you face an opposing general – and block while your own troops stand around uselessly – some nobody from the opposing army will invariably hit you from behind leaving you open to a fatal combo. There's no way you can stop it happening, and it's very infuriating.

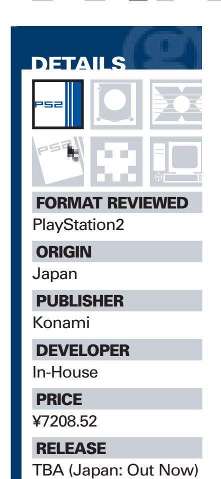
More than the repetitive, unsophisticated combat, though, what incenses us most is that, other than the extended Empires mode, this game is exactly the same as every other *Dynasty Warriors*. Were it not for the graphics, we could be playing this five years ago or five years in the future. There's no difference. *Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires* would be less annoying if we hadn't played it about eight times before. As it is, our patience has worn too thin to humour it any longer. *Dynasty Warriors* has a specific appeal to specific gamers – nobody beyond that demographic will derive much enjoyment from this.

VERDICT 3/10
SAME OLD, SAME OLD, AND IT NEVER GETS ANY BETTER



THE BEST IS BACK… AGAIN

WINNING ELEVEN 10



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥7208.52

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

The *Winning Eleven* update review is increasingly becoming a bone of contention within the industry. Unless Seabass and friends at KCET take the series in a radical new direction, it's almost inevitable that the latest iteration will be excellent. Undoubtedly, some will disagree with changes, or complain that certain refinements are detrimental to the series, but the fact remains that nothing comes close to *Winning Eleven*. Konami knows this, and the market continues to lap up each new title, however little the changes. This leaves a dilemma: should we mark a game down for lack of change, or take each version on merit?

Thankfully, the latest effort has all but removed the need for worry. While to a casual observer it may seem to be the same game that's been on constant rotation in a million PS2s for the last five years, anyone who knows their Italian turns from their R2 dragbacks will notice the differences between this and the last *Pro Evo* within seconds.

The most immediate change is speed. To address the slightly turgid nature of many a *PES5* encounter, *WE10* has been given a shot of adrenalin making it feel more 'free flowing'. Pacy players like Henry, Ronaldo and Walcott now glide past sluggish defenders. Only the increased physicality of tackling and shoulder-to-shoulder contact can stop them.

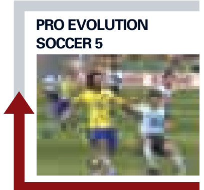
Passing is better. Short, quick balls are executed with greater speed and precision while long, raking passes and delicate lobbed through-balls are finally a real possibility. It's difficult to see how much further the passing can be improved, but doubtless Seabass will find a way. It's now possible to string together some truly breathtaking moves, mixing the short and the long ball to devastating effect. Improved off-the-ball player movement helps immeasurably.

This is by far the finest version yet. Expectation had been at an all-time low, save for the excitement of *Evo's* first next-gen appearance, but KCET has once again shown the rest of the world how it must be done. Faster, slicker, with countless new animations and creative possibilities: *Winning Eleven 10* has made its predecessor feel robotic, stiff and altogether redundant. Which makes our job that much easier.

VERDICT 9/10
ONCE AGAIN, WINNING ELEVEN HAS SURPASSED ITSELF

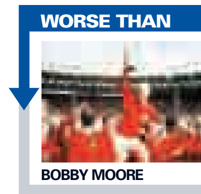


PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5



BETTER THAN

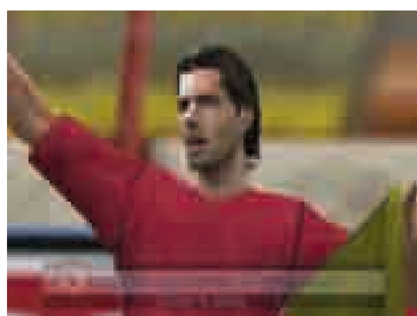
WORSE THAN



BOBBY MOORE



Player likenesses are noticeably improved. Lampard, for example, is looking close to indistinguishable from the real thing.



The sight of the horse-faced one in a United shirt may now be a piece of history. Or should that be *horse*-tory.



Expect to see scenes like this MANY times during the World Cup. Damn that buck-toothed genius.

AUTO ASSAULT

NICE CHASSIS, SHAME ABOUT THE BODYWORK

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
NCsoft

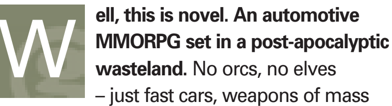
DEVELOPER
NetDevil

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
Massively Multi-player

MIN SPEC
1.6GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 8GB HD, Dial-up connection



Well, this is novel. An automotive MMORPG set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. No orcs, no elves – just fast cars, weapons of mass destruction, and a hostile world out to kill you. Add an in-depth crafting system, the ability to upgrade equipment, customise your car's chassis and three competing factions to spice up the PvP, and you have all the ingredients for a classic massively multi-player time sink. It's a bit of shame then that, like Eric Morecambe in the infamous "Andre Preview" orchestra sketch, *Auto Assault* plays the right notes but not necessarily in the right order.

When it does strike the right chord *Auto Assault* is a lot of fun. The RPG element is streamlined with just four character classes to choose from: Combat, Support, Special Ops and Command. Each class has its own dedicated chassis types. Support chassis are the largest taking on HGV proportions, Special Ops cars are small and nimble, and the Combat and Command chassis types lie somewhere in between. Cars can be traded in for superior models every five or six levels so if you don't like the look of your default vehicle at least you're not stuck with it for the entire game. Once past the mid-twenties in terms of character level, chassis get more exotic including tanks for the Combat class and motorbikes for the Special Ops. To add further individuality to the in-game appearance of your car, "trick" parts looted from fallen enemies can be added to the bodywork – for a small fee, naturally.

Combat – the staple of any MMOG – is consistently terrific. It's hard not to be impressed when you throw your car into a Scav encampment, spewing luminous jets of radioactive waste from your roof-mounted turret, punctuated by coruscating blasts of lightning and psionic bursts of energy. It's just as well given that the game is so combat-centric. The AI is quite weak, but what NPC enemies lack in quality they make up for in quantity. You'll frequently be engaged in pitched battles with over half a dozen enemies at a time, making for an adrenalin-charged experience.

Driving's satisfying, too. Combining Havok 2 physics with the grand scale of miles of rolling landscapes makes racing across the maps almost a game in itself. While the handling is more *GTA* than *GTR*, even the traction levels of the different surfaces (mud, sand, snow, and so on) have been fully modelled so you won't get very far on snow using low-profile racing tyres specialised for pavement. Impressive as all this is it's not perfect. At times the physics gets flaky with cars being pitched into spins for no reason. There's also a bewildering



FAQs

Q. WHERE'S THE WOW FACTOR?
They don't call it 'wasteland' for nothing. It's pretty barren out there…

Q. "CLEANING ELF PASTE FROM TYRES"?
Look out for the messages over the progress bar during map transitions. Some of them are absolutely hilarious.

Q. WHERE DO I GET PETS FROM?
You can only get the cute little RC car pets if you buy the Collectors' Edition.

Totalling your ride means a trip in one of these yellow monstrosities.

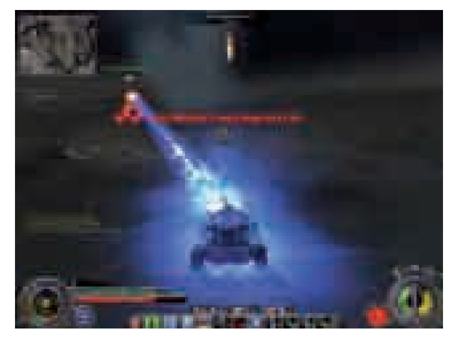




A static screenshot fails to show the full horror of how badly the avatars move.

FEELING THE HEAT

The key to surviving combat is keeping tabs on your heat capacity, not just your hit points. Having your weapons overheat in the middle of battle is often fatal so you'll need a power plant with a good heat capacity bonus and a high heat dissipation rating. More advanced weapons generate more heat per second, so while they do more damage you can't fire them constantly for as long. It's a key balancing mechanic so regularly adding points to your Tech attribute is advised. Also look out for the 'Heat per shot' statistic on new weapons: if it's too high, think about getting a new power plant too.



Don't do this, as combat is rather more difficult when you can't shoot.



The more exotic vehicles, such as this tank, are worth the wait.

level of inconsistency with the collision physics, which can allow three-ton cars to annihilate metal fences as if they were made of paper yet sometimes be stopped dead in their tracks by tents.

While a lot of the basics are right, it's the technical aspects of an MMOG where *Auto Assault* receives criticism. When compared to the graphical splendour of contemporary MMOGs like *Guild Wars* and *World Of Warcraft*, *Auto Assault* is disturbingly dull. The 3D models of the character avatar and the car chassis feel quite crude as they lack detail and the textures are rather plain and dreary. Once you've created your character from one of the three races on offer (Human, Mutant or BioMek), the narration of the backstory to your faction is accompanied by an in-game camera flyby of the opening map. Rather than generating a sense of atmosphere and wonder, the flyby simply demonstrates how bland the environments feel and reveals the limited draw distances of the 3D engine, making for a somewhat less than auspicious introduction.

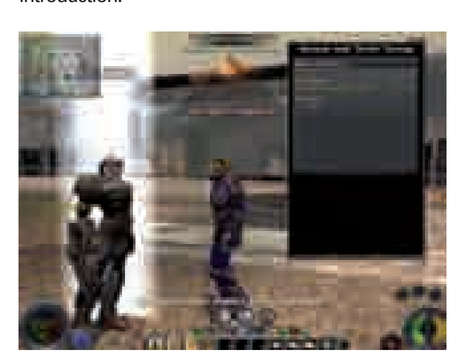
Even worse, MMOGs are social games yet here there's no incentive to form convoys as almost all quests can be done solo. In town, where the pace is literally more pedestrian and players aren't racing past each other at 70mph, the avatars don't even have emote animations to liven up chats. In fact, the standard of character animation is so poor it's a relief that you spend the bulk of the game in your car. The interface isn't the friendliest either – especially when buying and selling from vendors – but most damningly the game world just isn't vibrant enough. While the setting and automotive bias is undeniably appealing to the elf-adverse, *Auto Assault* lacks the ambience and elan of its fantasy-themed peers. With drab visuals, lifeless towns, frequent performance problems and little sign of an enthusiastic player community – the chat channels are very quiet – *Auto Assault* feels like a game where the key is in the ignition but no one's quite got around to turning it.



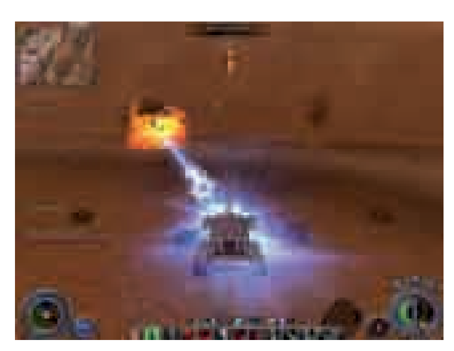
VERDICT 6/10

LOTS OF POTENTIAL, BUT NEEDS A GOOD POLISH

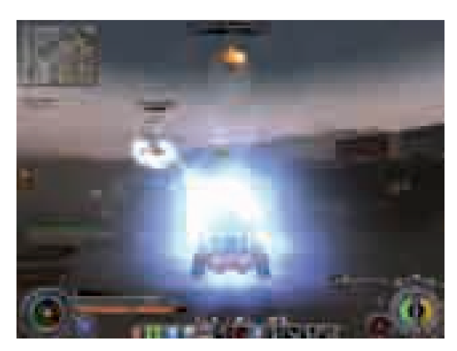




The huge spotlight effects at least make it easy to find quest givers.



"And that's for having your car stereo too loud!"



Not all the enemies have wheels.



What a demonic makeover can do for you – our hero Serph before…



…and after. Calm down ladies, he's spoken for.



Holy halitosis! This special move is called Foul Breath.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA

FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ghostlight

DEVELOPER
Atlus

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
30 June
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



It's taken ages for the latest edition of *Shin Megami Tensei* (or '*MegaTen*' to its fans) to hit these shores; reaching the UK a whopping two years after making its Japanese bow. It's even 18 months since *Lucifer's Call* impressed PAL gamers with its mix of cel-shaded characters and ferocious demon battles. Unfortunately, in the interim we've had many quality RPGs which diminish *Saga's* effect somewhat.

It gets off to a poor start. The impenetrability of that previous title has gone, but this dumbing down applies to the mechanics not the difficulty. So *Saga* is trying to be more accessible to newcomers while still pandering to the fan base. When you realise that many monster models are re-used with barely the slightest makeover, and that the story lapses into RPG cliché – bland hero, angry loose-cannon male sidekick, mysterious girl with powers she doesn't know how to use – first impressions aren't good. And that's before the random battles.

Yes, that genre staple is back in full force. Fights are even more numerous than before, and incredibly you can also buy an item that increases the frequency. Coupled with the dour atmosphere and dull level design, the initial stages are a trudge. Identikit areas make it easy to get lost in the maze of dungeons, while the action-to-plot ratio is annoyingly high. Rain beating down and characters talking to each other in emotionless monotone is reminiscent of a night out in Manchester.

It's a shame then that, after the opening cut-scenes, the story takes a back seat, as it's one of the most interesting elements of the game. Set in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic landscape known as The Junkyard it features six tribes battling one another – each believing the victor will reach Nirvana via the neutral Karma temple that lies amid this dystopia. Controlling Serph, leader of the Embryon, you meet a bizarre alien entity which bursts open imbuing all the humans with the power to transform into a demon. A strange girl found in the exploded pod holds the key to controlling this power, and your objective is to prevent this Sera from falling into the hands of rival factions – while simultaneously trying to defeat them in battle.

Thematically, *Digital Devil Saga* is darker than most RPGs; no surprise to players of *Lucifer's Call*. Nor will the battle system which follows the Press Turn template used so cleverly in that title. Essentially turn-based, there's the added bonus that critical hits and exploiting enemy weaknesses allows you extra turns. This adds a welcome

FAQs

Q. LENGTH?
It's a decent size with the main story lasting upwards of 25 hours, and a number of fairly large side-quests.

Q. FREQUENT ENCOUNTERS?
You betcha. Prepare to grit your teeth.

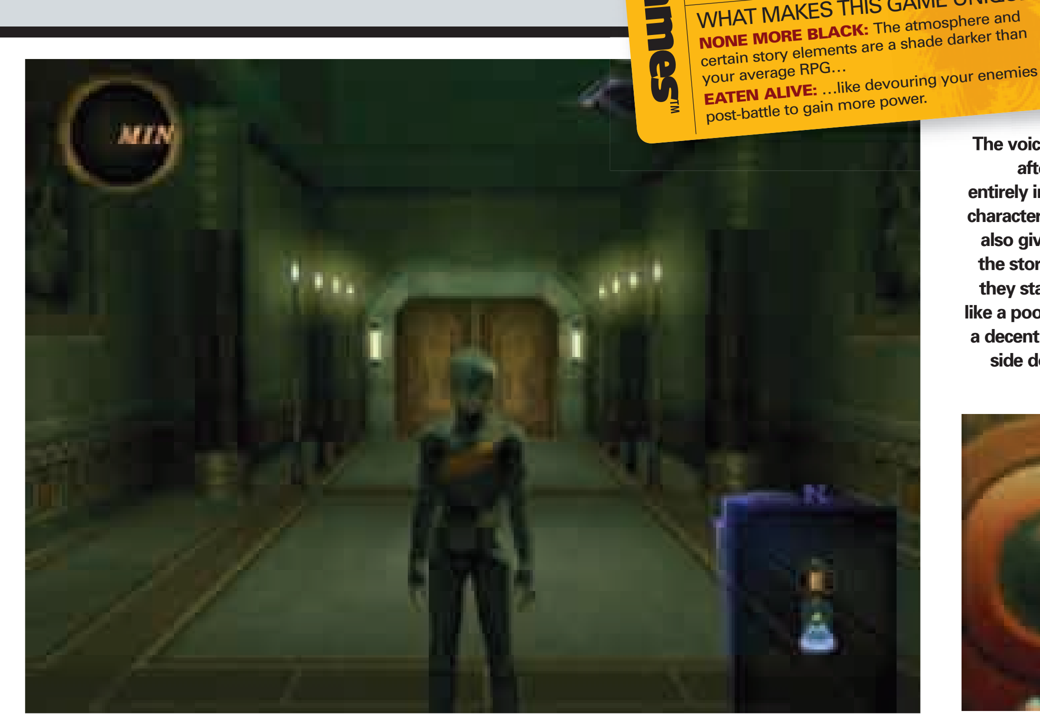
Q. FRUSTRATING?
Some sections have you scrapping every ten steps. So, yes.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

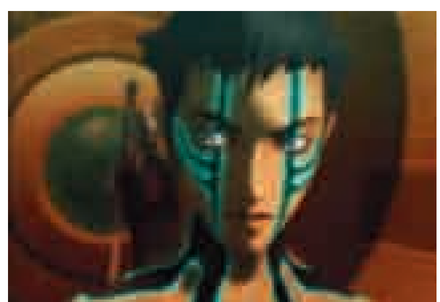
NONE MORE BLACK: The atmosphere and certain story elements are a shade darker than your average RPG…

EATEN ALIVE: …like devouring your enemies post-battle to gain more power.



DEVILS MAY NOT CRY

The voice acting initially seems rather flat, however, after a short while it becomes clear that this is entirely intentional. The strange light that curses the characters with the ability to transform into demons also gives them previously untapped emotions. As the story progresses and the protagonists develop, they start to show more feeling, and what seemed like a poorly chosen voice cast is revealed to possess a decent acting range. One or two characters let the side down, but overall the vocal talent impresses, despite the occasionally shaky scripting.





There's a decent range of impressively designed enemies; this bat demon being a good example.



Dumbass? Says you with the purple hair and the bad eye makeup? Oh please. Don't make us laugh.



Swearing, lesbianism and death – how can that possibly be boring? Er, unfortunately, it is.

strategic element, though that's hamstrung by the fact that you can't find an enemy's Achilles' heel without wasting a turn, and boss fights won't let you utilise it at all. Trial-and-error is the name of the game, but the regular difficulty spikes can force tedious repetition.

The ingenious Demon Conversation mechanic (which allowed you to recruit demons to fight alongside you) has been inexplicably jettisoned, replaced by the less appealing Mantra system. Upon defeating and devouring your foes, your Mantra bar increases by a degree dependent on the speed of victory. Additional points are available for any of your team using a Hunt move to finish your opponent. Admittedly, this allows for some interesting character customisation. But given that you never know which elements upcoming enemies are going to be weak against, you often find yourself choosing a mantra that's pretty useless to learn. The ever-increasing cost of each Mantra means you need to seek more fights against relatively feeble opponents to earn enough money to upgrade – highly frustrating.

It seems that for every positive point in *Digital Devil Saga* there's a wealth of negatives. The intriguing plot is full of occult lore and quasi-religious imagery, but it takes an age to get going, and ends abruptly (a sequel which hasn't yet been announced for PAL release continues the story). The battle system works well, but is ruined by the frequency of encounters. Then there's the audiovisual qualities – impressive character design contrasted with bland backdrops, and music let down by the repetition of the audio cues.

In the long wait for *Digital Devil Saga* we've been spoiled by some bar-raising and envelope-pushing efforts in the RPG genre, which make it seem rather tired and staid. With *Rogue Galaxy*, *Kingdom Hearts II* and *Final Fantasy XII* on the PAL horizon (and already available to import), the *MegaTen* series looks in serious need of a facelift.





VERDICT 5/10

DISAPPOINTINGLY DULL DEMON-DESTROYING DRUDGERY

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: LUCIFER'S CALL

JUST LIKE

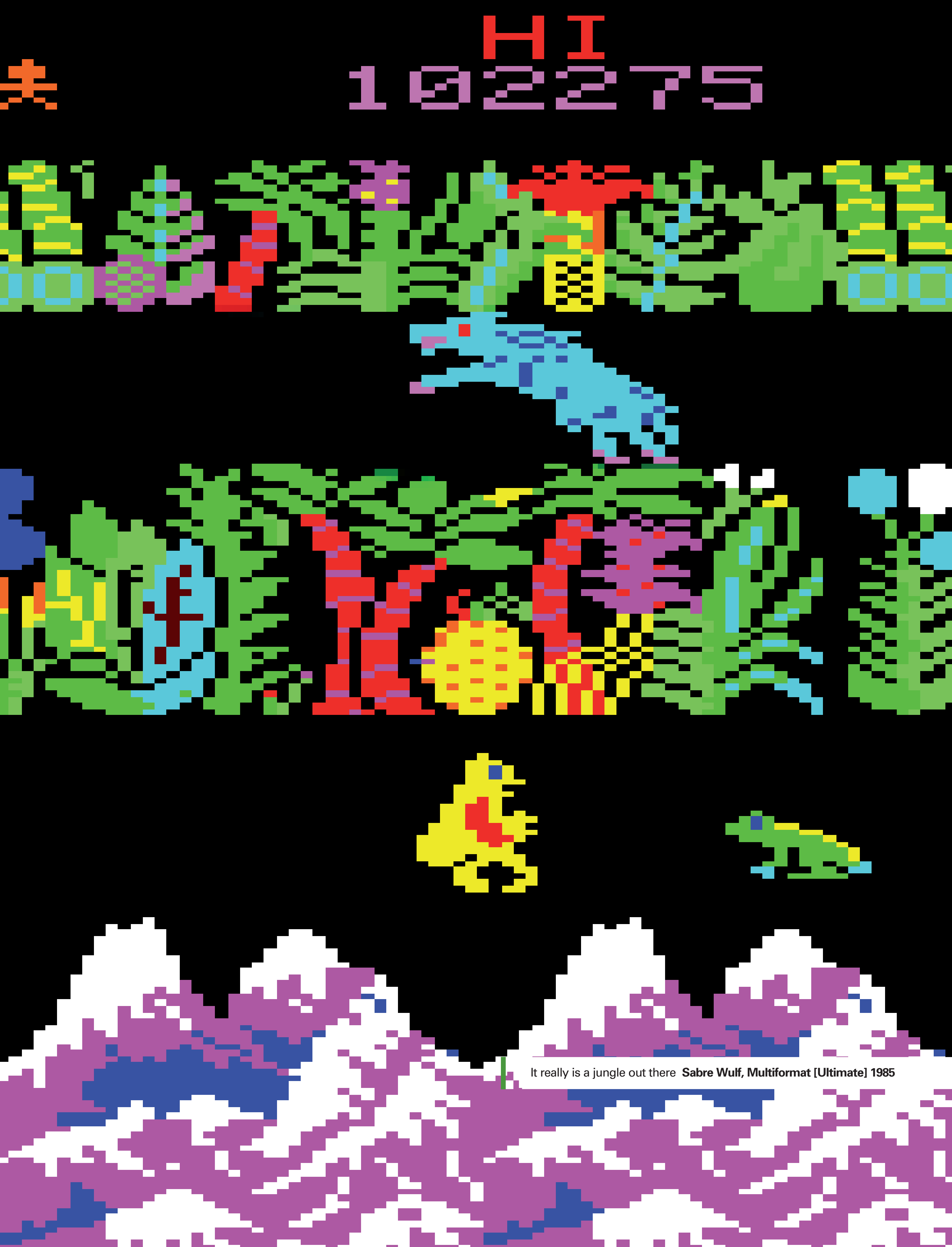
WORSE THAN

DRAGON QUEST: THE JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING

SC

002115

4



It really is a jungle out there **Sabre Wulf, Multiformat [Ultimate] 1985**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.45 JUNE 2006
00p
GOAL!
THE HISTORY OF FOOTBALL GAMES
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, WHY DON'T THEY REMAKE?, RETRO CONTACT, WORST LICENCE EVER AND MORE…
TEAM 17's WORMS
Opening a can of…
BISHI BASHI SPECIAL
Classic moment
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic consoles and illustrious software

RETRO NEWS

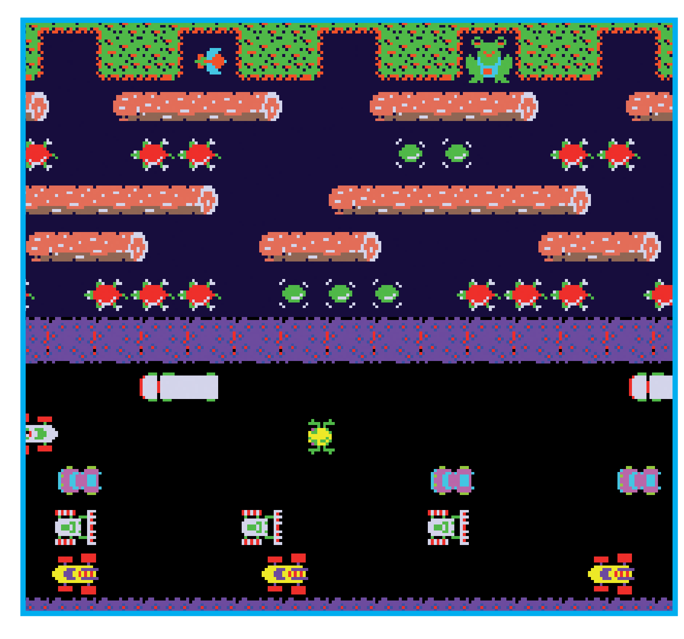
Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

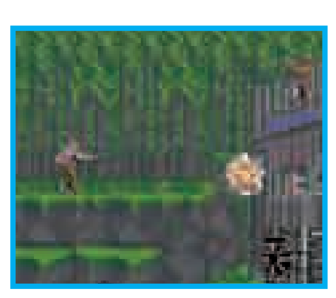
Is Microsoft letting a golden opportunity to slip through its fingers? I'm talking about the Xbox Live service downloadable content announcements made at this year's E3. Don't get me wrong, it's great to see Microsoft securing new arcade titles, but where's the originality?

Yes, *Sonic The Hedgehog* is great, and the gameplay will probably be added to, but we've played it plenty thanks to Sega's recent *Sonic Collection*. Then you have *Rally-X*, *Pac-Man* and *Galaga*, all ace games, but we've seen them countless times before. Only Konami seems to be taking Xbox Live Arcade seriously, but where are the classics like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Crime Fighters* and *Sunset Riders*? Come on, guys, you all have huge back catalogues so stop playing it safe and throw in the odd curveball like *Bells & Whistles*, *Combat School*, *Nebulas Ray*, *Dynamite Dux* and *Galaxy Force*. Stick them up for 400 points and you're bound to get some punters. Xbox Live Arcade is good, but it could be amazing. Let's hope something is done about it soon.



Darran Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer





▲ Konami announces titles including *Contra* for Xbox Live Arcade.



ARCADE GOING LIVE

MICROSOFT REVEALS THE LATEST PLANS FOR XBOX LIVE ARCADE

There are always plenty of rumours in the run up to any E3, and this year was no exception. For a few months, speculation has been building that *MAME* would be appearing on Xbox Live Arcade along with plenty of hits from Sega's Dreamcast library, but sadly it wasn't to be. Sega's only announcement for Xbox Live Arcade was *Sonic The Hedgehog: High Speed*, somewhat disappointing when you consider the massive back catalogue that is available to the company. Sure, it's certainly nice to hear that a new version of *Golden Axe* is in the works, but why not stick the original on Live Arcade in the meantime? It would raise awareness and also make us very happy. Oh and Sega, stick *Shinobi* on there as well while you're at it.



The international corporation that is Sega had a somewhat disappointing line-up, but it's what Konami had on offer that was much more impressive. The company has announced *Frogger*, *Contra*, *Super Contra*, *Time Pilot*, *Scramble* and the excellent *Track & Field* (better known as *Hyper Sports*) – not a bad line-up by any stretch of the imagination, but we'd love to have seen a few more classics revealed. While no release dates have been announced yet, it would appear that Konami is taking a leaf out of Midway's book and will be delivering both original and enhanced versions of each game.

Speaking of Midway, it has not revealed any new titles other than the ones that we reported on a few months back. For those who can't remember, the games in question were *Paperboy*, *Defender*, *Root Beer Tapper* and *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*. Interestingly, there was no news on *Cyberball*, the fifth game that was originally announced, but considering it's not the greatest game in Midway's back catalogue we're not too fussed about it.

Finally, after recently revealing that *Pac-Man* and *Galaga* would be heading to Microsoft's service, Namco has also announced that *Rally-X* and *Dig Dug* are also on the way. Again, there's no news as to whether they will be enhanced versions or what achievements they will be featuring, but with any luck it should at least add a little spice to all those games that we've played countless times before.

IT'S A ME: MARIO!

NINTENDO REVEALS FIRST GAMES FOR VIRTUAL CONSOLE

As well as showing off the Virtual Console's controller, at E3 Nintendo also revealed four titles: *Super Mario Bros*, *Super Mario 64*, *Super Mario World* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*. No price details were revealed, it's not known how it will work, and it's still unclear if these games will be included with the actual Wii – like built-in console games of old – but it's pleasing to see some well-known faces. The only company aside from Sega to pledge support for the Virtual Console is Hudson Soft. Proudly showing off *Bonk's Adventure*, the *Bomberman* creator pledges to release at least a hundred games on the service.

While Internet sites are giddy at the thought of playing titles such as *Secret Of Mana*, *Sin & Punishment* and *Earthbound*, we don't think it'll be that simple. It's possible that the BBFC will want to view every game due to appear on the system, immediately ruling out most Japanese-only titles as they'd need to be fully translated. The



▲ Virtual Console to include various *Mario* titles.

Virtual Console is a great way for third-party publishers to make maximum profit from old titles without the worry of development costs. So will Nintendo localise the games that weren't deemed suitable for a US or European release the first time around? Probably not.

There are other things to consider. Just because a company held the rights to a licence at one time, it doesn't mean it still has access – one reason why games like *Alien Vs Predator* and *The Punisher* haven't appeared on recent Capcom compilations.

Both Nintendo's Virtual Console and Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade have amazing potential, but whether this will be fully tapped remains to be seen.

UMD OR EMU?

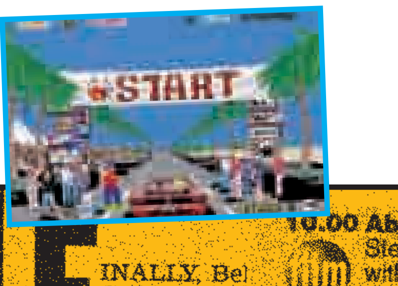
MORE NEW EMULATORS HIT PSP

The PSP is certainly reaching its stride at the moment. Not only is a plethora of great games finally beginning to appear, but also the emulation scene is now in full swing. The SNES, CPC 464, ZX Spectrum, Mega Drive, NES and Commodore 64 are just a few of the emulators currently up and running – with various degrees of success – but hackers aren't content to rest there.

The latest projects include a rather excellent BBC Micro emulation called PSPBeeb (a port of Beebm) and Daedalus N64 which obviously emulates Nintendo's 64-bit console. It's still suffering from a few problems, and isn't perfect, but it's nonetheless a stunning achievement.

Best of all, though, is the news that *MAME* is finally available on Sony's portable handheld. It's only in the beta stages at the moment, but the project is already receiving plenty of support on various forums, so it should only be a matter of time before an improved update is announced.

Predictably, none of the above emulators are compatible with the latest PSP updates (currently version 2.7), so you may consider forgoing titles like *LocoRoco* in favour of the old classics.



Retro DIARY

Old-school gaming is on the up, so games™ dedicates itself to keeping you up to date with what's going down in the world of retro

JULY '06

Capcom Classics Collection Remixed

Date: 14 July **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

One of the most comprehensive compilations available, we can assure you that the lengthy wait for CCC:Remixed will definitely have been worth it when it finally arrives in the summer. 21 retro favourites have been squeezed in – many of which come with the bonus of wireless multi-player! You will be delighted by the likes of *1941: Counter Attack*, *Black Tiger*, *Magic Sword*, *Strider* and *Quiz & Dragons*.

SEPTEMBER '06

Extreme Ghosts 'N' Goblins

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

We're not altogether sure if this is such a good idea for a remake, to be honest. *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* was ridiculously difficult in its original form, so we can't imagine things being all that different this time around… surely that's going to result in more than a few broken PSPs before the day is out? More than likely. Those with no gaming skills should steer well clear.

PowerStone Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

More lovin' from Capcom, and this time it's two of the greatest Dreamcast games. *PowerStone Collection* contains both of the *PowerStone* titles, along with new weapons and features that utilise the PSP to its fullest. Gamers will also have the ability to play three other players via Wi-Fi (on *PowerStone2*). Let's hope this means Capcom is considering a brand new outing for this highly underrated Dreamcast franchise.

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Metal Slug Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** SNK Playmore **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

SNK Playmore hasn't revealed what extras will be included. But considering *Metal Slug 3*, *4* and *5* are currently available separately on the PlayStation2 and Xbox, this collection already represents great value for money. We're worried about the new controls that have been mentioned for the Nintendo Wii though…

Capcom Classics Collection: Reloaded

Date: Q **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

Not content with its excellent *Remixed* compilation, Capcom is hard at work on its next compendium of greatness. Featuring a similar number of games as the *Remixed* version, *Reloaded* will boast *Eco Fighters*, *Knights Of The Round*, *The King Of Dragons*, *Commandos* and at least three versions of *Street Fighter II*. The anticipation is killing us.

If you know of, or are hosting any retro events, please contact the magazine at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

GRADIUS® PORTABLE

Format: PSP
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: TBA (Japan: Out Now)
Price: ¥5229
Games include:
Gradius, Gradius II, Gradius III, Gradius IV, Gradius Gaiden

HIGH GRADE ACTION

Gradius is hard. Really hard. Whether at the Arcade, on a SNES or on a PSP – if you're not au fait with the sometimes ridiculous demands of the shoot-'em-up genre, then it may well be worth looking elsewhere for your portable retro thrills. If however, you spend your days searching for chains, analysing boss patterns and training your thumb reaction time to near robotic standards, then *Gradius Portable* may be exactly what you're looking for.

It's a simple yet comprehensive package, comprising the original four arcade games (imaginatively entitled *Gradius I-IV*) and the Japan-only PSOne title *Gradius Gaiden*. Anyone who has dipped into Konami's superb series in the past will be in familiar territory. Players take control of Vic Viper a small and easily manoeuvrable ship, and then have to blast their way through countless enemy ships and monsters while dodging all manner of debris, bullets and enemies. But you already knew that.

The unique power-up system that was introduced in the second *Gradius* returns and is as strategic and intelligently implemented as ever. In terms of conversion, each title has been lovingly restored with improved speech, visuals and the option to alter the aspect ratio. For *Gradius* fans, the collection is an almost inevitable purchase, so for the purpose of review it's necessary to dissect each game individually.

Today the original *Gradius* shows its age. The gameplay is still sound, but the incredibly sparse visuals and barebones audio aren't particularly appealing when the sequels are all available on the same disc. Purists will be pleased to see its inclusion, but we'd be very surprised if it's played as anything other than a brief flirtation with nostalgia.

Gradius II marked the point where the series was really launched into the stratosphere. The inclusion of the aforementioned power-up system really expanded the overall gameplay – what was once a fairly simplistic yet brutally hard shooter was now a fairly deep and intelligent action game.

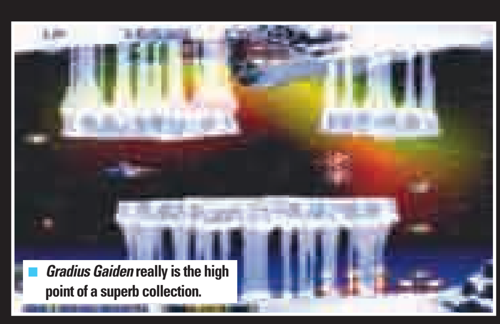

The use of such a colourful palette helps to add to the confusion.

This continued into *Gradius III* which was a similar game albeit with an almost impenetrable difficulty level and barely improved visuals. Still an enthralling mix of reaction speed and concentration, but one of the compilation's low points.

Things improved rapidly when *Gradius IV* and *Gaiden* introduced polygons. While *IV* was little more than a retread of *II* and *III* but with improved looks and better balance, *Gaiden* was a treat that looked and played superbly. Almost worth the asking price on its own, this stunning shooter is the *Gradius* series' defining moment, and by far the finest title on this excellent compilation. It's hard, it's pretty and it's utterly compelling. Unfortunately, though, it does show up its predecessors as the ageing stalwarts that they are.

The package is rounded off with a gallery, and a handy save feature eases off the difficulty level somewhat. When compared to the action games of today though, the shoot-'em-up genre is definitely the choice of the hardcore – the type of gamer who will happily dedicate time and effort to enhancing their own ability and learning patterns to ultimately gain more enjoyment from a game.

If you fall into that category, then you could do a lot worse than *Gradius Portable*. Available now to import from Japan, this collection of superb shooters would take pride of place in anyone's PSP collection, and will satisfy anyone hankering for some old-school arcade action.


Gradius Gaiden really is the high point of a superb collection.



OVERALL SCORE 85%



THE BEAUTY OF SPONTANEITY

BISHI BASHI SPECIAL



Release: 2000
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

▲ *Bishi Bashi* players know the significance of this screen. Oh yes.

◀ Left and right jumping girl – the bane of our existence.

We've all been there. You're playing a mini-game with friends, and then something happens. A compulsion. A necessity. There's no stopping it – everyone has to play this one, single mini-game until a champion is decided. But it never happens. At no point will the competitors back down and admit defeat. No score seems unobtainable. It's a thing of beauty – thousands of years of human competitive evolution focused into a 20-second, brightly coloured Japanese mini-game.

It happened to us recently. You may know the game. We don't like talking about it, but our shrink assures us it will be therapeutic. It all began with a little skipping girl, two dual shocks and a singular boast of "I'm amazing at this one". Oh how we hate you, *Bishi Bashi*. After two hours of bloodshot eyes, aching wrists, and plenty of tears – a moment of clarity. A realisation that the best part of a Sunday afternoon had been thrown away, wasted on the rapid depression of three buttons on a PlayStation joypad. Three grown men looked at each other. Knowingly. Sadly. One was champion, but it mattered not. In many ways, they had all lost.

We can't be alone. In fact, we know we're not. A developer recently told us of his team's obsession with jumping the furthest from a cliff in the new motorbike-cum-Hawks game *Crusty Demons*. These moments are born of spontaneity, they take over gamers' lives and then leave as quickly as they arrived. A truly unique aspect of gaming culture that anyone outside of videogames could never understand.

And don't get us started on the mini-games of *Samba De Amigo*…

GREAT GAME BOSSES



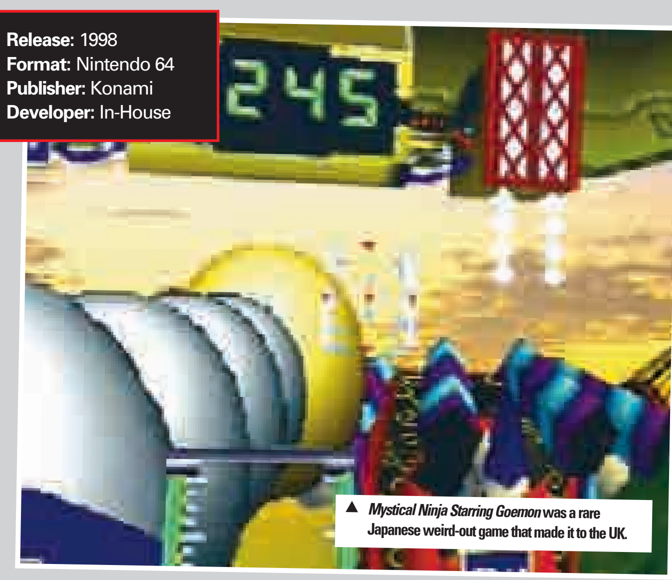
MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON

NASAL BULLET!

Lots of weird things happened in *Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon*. It was one of only a few truly bizarre Japanese games to make it to the US and UK. For hardcore gamers, *Mystical Ninja* was a breath of fresh air. It had some of the strangest moments ever to grace the N64 – not least its peculiar boss battles including a tricky remake of the plate-spinning ghost of the SNES *Goemon* titles. The first, a giant fire-breathing head, left a lasting impression, but it was the second that stood out – the first giant robot Impact battle against Wartime Kabuki Robot Kashiwagi.

Preceded by an insane song and a few minutes of blowing things up, the battle pitted Goemon's giant robot Impact against a samurai bot with nasty sword attacks and spinning disc throws. Ultimately, he proved no match for the power of Impact's Nasal Bullets, one-two punches, mouth laser and other pleasingly visceral attacks. Metallic, painful-sounding thunks resounded, engine oil spurted and robots exploded. It wasn't the most challenging battle in the world, but it was entirely unexpected, pleasingly random and hugely satisfying. It was also accompanied by one of the silliest songs in videogames *I Am Impact!*, famous among the suspiciously hardcore Internet Nintendo 64 community.

Release: 1998
Format: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House



▲ *Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon* was a rare Japanese weird-out game that made it to the UK.



Why Don't They Remake...

BUSHIDO BLADE

SQUARESOFT'S UNDERRATED FIGHTER NEEDS TO BE RESURRECTED...

Release: **1997**
Format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Square**
Developer: **Light Weight**

As enjoyable as Japanese one-on-one fighting games can be, no one can dispute how immensely unrealistic they are. Based purely in the realm of the videogame, they offer a virtual sport focusing far more on the player than the on-screen character, and are very successful in doing so. *Bushido Blade*, however, was different. Released back in 1997 on the PlayStation to critical acclaim but commercial ignorance, Squaresoft's swordfighting simulation stood on its own as a completely unique addition to the genre.

The hook was simple – this was a real fight, and swords, by their very nature, are incredibly dangerous. *Bushido Blade*, unlike such games as *Soul Calibur*, recognised this. If you stabbed someone through the chest, they would die. Strike them in the leg, and they'd limp and stumble around for the rest of the fight. It made each match an incredibly tense, tactical affair, with both Bushido warriors carefully encircling each other, blades poised, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

By setting the game in feudal Japan, Squaresoft – which merged with Enix in 2003 to become Square Enix – immediately had access to a massive amount of imagery and symbols from cinema, that could be placed directly into the game space. What is more evocative than the classic Kurosawa stylings of two samurai meeting under falling cherry blossom or in a field of bamboo? At the time, *Bushido Blade*'s visuals were superb, and mixing a strong audiovisual treatment with the tense 'human chess' of the combat was a masterstroke – it was like nothing else on the market.

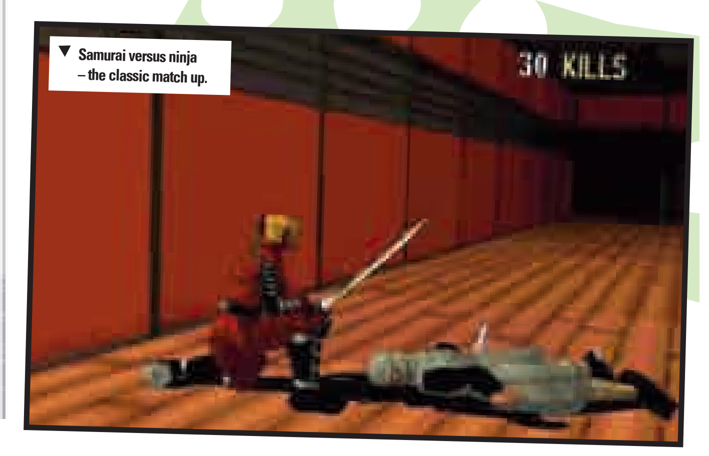
This point still holds true today. Although a sequel was released on PSOne, and a spiritual successor on PlayStation2 (*Kengo*), neither captured the understated beauty and brutality of the original *Blade*. Therefore we propose a brand new version not on PlayStation3 or Xbox 360, but on Nintendo's recently re-named Wii. Obviously, we don't know exactly how successful the motion sensor capabilities of the nunchuk controller will be, but if it functions as Nintendo has promised (and how we desperately hope that it will), then we could happily see ourselves gripping the remote in one hand and the analogue in the other, staring intently at the screen, waiting to pounce on an unwitting opponent.

With force feedback, each clash of steel on steel could be felt in your hand, and with some clever manipulation of the analogue stick, movement around the arenas shouldn't be a huge problem. Perhaps Square could even shift the game to a first-person perspective using the motion sensor in the left handset to look around, with the right one as a sword and the stick to move and strafe. Or maybe that would be so complicated we would need to require our brains. Nevertheless, the appeal of using the Wii's controller as a solid steel katana is surely unanimous. Slicing off opponents' heads, cutting off limbs, skewering them through the chest, all with our own two hands? Don't mind if we do.

Whether or not Square and Sony would be willing to resurrect this long-dead franchise is unknown, and unfortunately we would suggest that the likelihood of it actually happening is slim, but if there's not a sword simulation game on Wii within the first year of release, then we'd be utterly amazed.



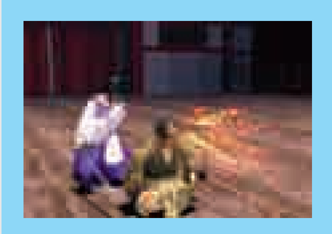
▼ Once upon a time, this game looked beautiful. How times change…



▼ Samurai versus ninja – the classic match up.

SLICE AND DICE

The key to success in *Bushido Blade* is defence. If you leave yourself open, you're likely to end up without a head sooner rather than later. With the Wii controller, perhaps holding a button would switch you into 'Block' mode, so any swipe or swing will act as a defensive parry. We fancy knocking an opponent's guard up in the air, letting go of block and plunging a blade straight through their heart. Brutal.





KICK OFF [Various Formats] Anco, 1989 – Original UK Advert



Greatest RETRO Game Ever

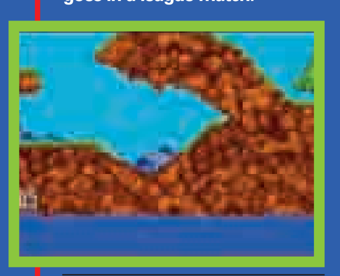


Worms

It may have managed to lose an Amiga Format game design competition, but where would we be today without Worms? A game so good that it brought a whole new meaning to the phrase 'opening a can'…

DEATH BEFORE DEFEAT

There are times when only severe action will get the job done – and *Worms* accommodated by presenting the ideal way to use your dying breath to finish an enemy. It's been a hard battle and, with only one health point left, one of your worms is close to death. He's survived another round, so it's his last chance to shine. Now's the time to kamikaze. Capable of a lot of damage and even knocking your rival off the screen, this was the only way to die – a way to show smug players that you don't mind dealing a few low blows to win a round. It may be fun and games in a friendly, but anything goes in a league match.



▲ To be a kamikaze worm is a very noble calling indeed.

Release: 1995
Format: Multi
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Team 17

Now, we here at **games™** are not exactly a soft bunch, but there are times when you have to be thankful that fate is sometimes kind. At the risk of sounding too sentimental, some things are simply meant to be and this particular title proves that this is the case.

The story behind *Worms* is a rather heart warming one. Andy Davidson spent many an hour hunched over his Atari creating the game – originally named *Artillery* – and, after losing a game design competition hosted by Amiga Format, decided to give it one last shot and present the idea to the guys at Team 17. The group loved the idea, signed him up on the spot and the rest, as they say, is history. *Worms* is now a highly respected franchise across all formats, but it's the original game for which we reserve our fondest memories.

At the time there was nothing quite like *Worms*. You had *Lemmings*, that was already an outstanding hit, but despite being superb it simply didn't have the 'party appeal' needed to entertain more than one person for any extended period of time. *Worms* changed everything. Suddenly, four people could happily crowd around a PC for hours controlling battle-hardened annelids that had amusingly been named after your friends/relatives/pets/favourite bands, and wage war on friends and artificial intelligence alike. Hurrah.



▲ Although sad, watching your worms explode was something you got used to. "Oh dear."

It's difficult to think of a more straightforward formula. Up to four teams of four worms are planted randomly on a 2D landscape and given the task of destroying each other with the host of weapons that were available. Easy. But lying beneath this veil of simplicity existed a level of play that many poured tens of hours of their time into attaining. While early games were full of easy bazooka shots and dynamite explosions, play soon turned into a battle of skill and wits. Correctly judging wind strength and the angle of a throw to land a grenade on a foe's nose precisely became a scarily frequent occurrence. While 'prodding' a rival worm off a cliff only to see him land on a well-placed mine was mildly satisfying, seeing this action trigger a series of explosions that would result in a wholly dead team member was marked as an extreme achievement. Soon, tactically skipped turns and surprise death-dealing Dragon Punches were the norm and if you wanted to be able to compete on any level, you had to get plenty of practice in.



Practice, as it goes, was easy to come by. The random landscape generator ensured that the game had endless appeal and – unless you



▲ Maria is about to get so punished. You can see it in Morgan's eyes.

"BENEATH THE VEIL OF SIMPLICITY LAY SOME TRUE GAMEPLAY"

really wanted to – you rarely saw the same landscape twice. Also aiding in 'mixing it up' were the unpredictable crate drops that ensured that the weapons balance changed as the matches went on.

Upon discovering a crate, you would generally pray to whatever higher being it is that you believed in that the box would contain a sheep. Sometime you received other goodies such as a mini-gun, but the sheep was the real jewel of the special weapons crown. Bleating as it went on its way, that sheep would run in the chosen direction and explode – dealing up to a whopping 70 points worth of damage – when detonated by the player. Lethal in the right hands and, thankfully, lethal in the wrong hands as well.

We remember the game so fondly because current-generation consoles have seen it necessary to move the franchise into three dimensions – a decision that has worked to a point, but which has also seen the series drop a hulking lump of charm in translation. Don't get us wrong, we certainly have something of a soft spot for the Holy Hand Grenade (hallelujah) and the Super Sheep, but sometimes you just have to get back to basics, and it has to be said that the original *Worms* game pushes all the right buttons.



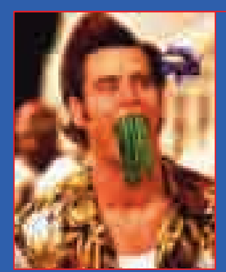


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1995



ON THE RADIO

A catchy tune and a silly dance is all you need to get to the top of the charts as *Guaglione* by Pérez Prado proved in 1995. You may not remember it from the name, but it was that irritating tune from the Guinness ad. It didn't stop there, that advert – complete with said chart-topper – soon appeared as a screensaver on PCs everywhere. That was a very long year.



AT THE MOVIES

Although not a patch on the first movie, *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* saw Carrey again managing to be quite funny. Although we thought that hearing the rubber-faced, gangle-rod say 'alrighty then' continuously for a further hour and a half would be horrible, it was actually a top film and had that great bit with the chap that looked a bit like the 'Monopoly guy'.



ON THE TELEVISION

There have been plenty of awesome cartoons over the years, but 1995 was the year that *Pinky And The Brain* was recognised as genius and separated from *Animaniacs*. Once a week, for half an hour, you could watch lab mice attempt to take over the world with hilarious consequences. A favourite of ours was when Brain built the robot man suit and got an office job. He had a tiny mouse head and a big body. It was funny.



▲ Snowman smiles as worm dies. Proof, finally, that snowmen are evil.

Retro

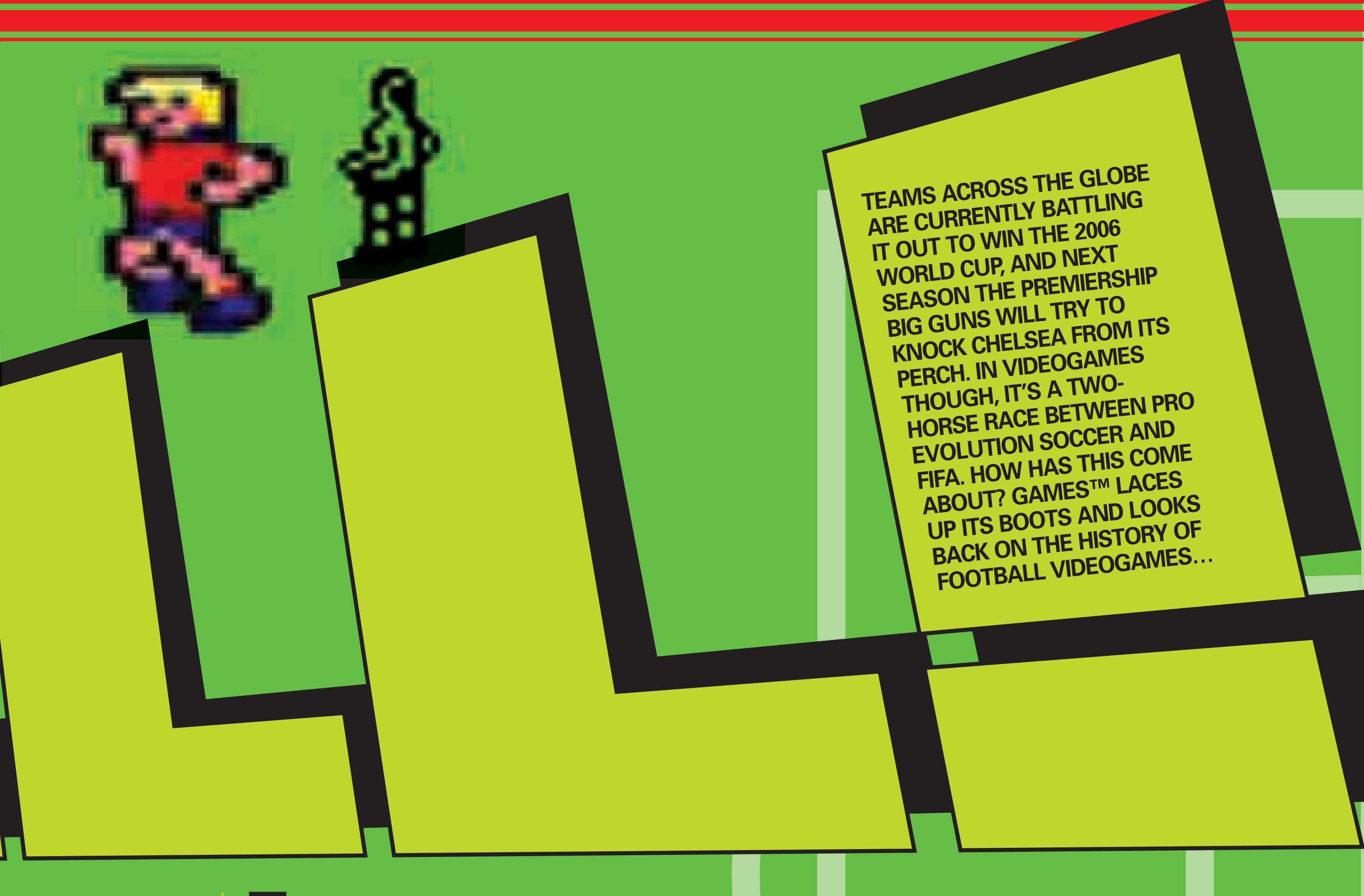
GOOOOAAAAALLLLLL

THE HISTORY OF FOOTBALL VIDEOGAMES

Retro Feature



This screenshot just screams Pele, doesn't it? Who needs *Pro Evo* when you can have a bunch of rectangles.



TEAMS ACROSS THE GLOBE ARE CURRENTLY BATTLING IT OUT TO WIN THE 2006 WORLD CUP, AND NEXT SEASON THE PREMIERSHIP BIG GUNS WILL TRY TO KNOCK CHELSEA FROM ITS PERCH. IN VIDEOGAMES THOUGH, IT'S A TWO-HORSE RACE BETWEEN PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER AND FIFA. HOW HAS THIS COME ABOUT? GAMES™ LACES UP ITS BOOTS AND LOOKS BACK ON THE HISTORY OF FOOTBALL VIDEOGAMES…

Like David Beckham, metatarsal injuries, and meat and potato pies washed down with beer, the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series of games has become intertwined with football. In fact, *Pro Evo* and Electronic Arts' *FIFA* franchise dominate the charts with so much force that they were the two best selling games of last year – even beating *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*.

For some people, such dominance by EA and Konami is very bad news indeed – "Football games are a bit stuck," says Jon Hare, legendary creator of *Sensible Soccer* – for others it marks a watershed. But at last, after 25 years of soccer videogaming, we're getting close to perfection. We've seen *Pro Evo,* in particular, develop hugely since it effectively made its debut as *Konami Hyper Soccer* on the NES in 1992, becoming the only football series ever – with the exception of the *Championship Manager/Football Manager* evolution – to continually surpass the previous version with each new incarnation. Remarkable. Even more so when you come to realise that, despite the sub-industry of football games traditionally being awash with competition, we are now in a situation where many developers have entirely given up trying to beat *Pro Evo* and *FIFA*.

"I think that it would be very hard to compete with EA for the licence and Konami for the realism," says Lee Kirton head of PR for Atari which created its last notable soccer games *Ronaldo V-Football* and *UEFA Challenge* five years ago (albeit under the Infogrames name). "Konami and EA do a great job in the market and personally I think both franchises – Pro Evo and FIFA – will grow as technology changes," he adds.

To understand just how far we have come, it is necessary to look back to where we have been, starting with the first big soccer title, *Pele's Championship Soccer*, created for the Atari 2600 in 1981. This primitive three-a-side game – also released as *Soccer* and *Championship Soccer* – saw your players move one block at a time. It had none of the fancy graphics and realistic sounds of today's offerings and neither did Atari's own *Real Sports Soccer* in 1983 – at least the players were not indistinguishable rectangles this time. It was these games that helped sow the seeds of an industry that would drastically improve over the next 20 or so years.

Back in the Eighties, it was obvious where football games could improve. A specific case in point was the classic 8-bit game *Match Day* which kicked off with a Spectrum version and concentrated on the core game, omitting substitutions, formations and crowd noise. At the time, this didn't appear to matter and the game – viewed from a faux-3D side-on perspective – was a hit for Ocean Software in 1985.

Just as the creators of *FIFA* and *Pro Evo* like to tweak their games, *Match Day*'s creator Jon Ritman also liked to play around, and ended up pioneering the football sequel. His first attempt was a simple upgrade of *Match Day* – adding crowd noise and a specific World Cup competition that would coincide with Mexico '86. He then worked on *Match Day II*,



OLD GOLD

When US Gold released *World Cup Carnival* it scored a major own goal because the game was a barely enhanced version of a title created two years earlier. Although the company intended to create an entirely new game, it was let down by developers leaving the firm just months to go and no game. And so Artic's *World Cup Football* was dusted off and repackaged, causing uproar according to US Gold playtester Simon Hadlington, "Games had moved on in the time since the original was released, making the playability massively outdated. But US Gold released it nonetheless, putting the game into a double-sized cardboard box, and adding a couple of posters, a flag and a World Cup guide. This allowed US Gold to up the asking price from £6.95 to £9.95! It sold much better than the original, but magazines picked up on it and quite rightly thought it was a bit of a con."

Amstrad Action magazine gave the game zero per cent while US Gold was hauled over the coals in trade mag CTW, and yet the firm's operations director was unrepentant, "*World Cup Carnival* is a modified, improved, enhanced, localised version of another piece of software," he said. "Why should we have drawn attention to Artic's game?" Despite later admitting its mistake, US Gold was given FIFA's official licence for *Italy '90* and *USA '94*.


WORLD CUP SHOCKER





which featured enhanced graphics, a kick-o-meter which allowed you to measure the power of your shots and passes, and a trademarked Diamond Deflective System that allowed the ball to bounce around realistically. "*Match Day II* was simply the standard thing that I'm sure most designers feel after finishing a game," Ritman says. "Faced with the reality of a finished game, it becomes clear how it could be improved."

Prior to creating his own title, Ritman had never played a football game before; *Match Day* was the product of his own vision. Ocean had wanted a Spectrum version of Commodore 64's *International Soccer*, but he didn't even bother to play the game beforehand. "I was relieved to find my game was very different to *International Soccer*," he says, but when he tried the same trick in 1998 creating *Super Match Soccer* for Acclaim on the PlayStation and PC, his attempts to go his own way and concentrate more on the mechanics of the game rather than the glossy television-style presentation of the day failed to make an impact. "I tried to give more control to the player, but this was not well received by a press weaned on the likes of *FIFA*," he says.

During the Eighties, the lack of power in the 8-bits meant realistic-looking games couldn't happen because the shirts with the badges, proper faces and stadiums were impossible to recreate. Instead, faced with players who still wanted to see elements of the sport they played at school or watched on the terraces, a creative programmer concentrated on enhancing the gameplay, adding extra features and greater realism.

Not everyone succeeded. US Gold's *World Cup Carnival* – a version of Artic Computing's *World Cup Football* (see Old Gold boxout) – in 1986 was a disaster and soccer for the Nintendo NES had a long way to go before reaching any kind of perfection, struggling as it did with primitive artificial intelligence.

Some gems did emerge including *MicroProse Soccer* created for the Commodore 64 by Sensible Software. It had speed, rain (allowing for great sliding tackles), and the concept of aftertouch (allowing you to swerve the ball after you'd kicked it). *MicroProse* inspired many football games and became a landmark title. You could replay every goal and see almost everything that was going on around you on the pitch. For many, it became a straight choice between this and Audiogenic's *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* in 1988.

Emlyn offered an isometric view of the action and was also packed with options. It was one of the first games to try to introduce an element of realism. The players would gain momentum as they moved; a sudden change of direction causing them to slow momentarily. The way your shot would work depended very much on what you were doing at the time – running or standing still – using a complex control method.

Emlyn Hughes and *MicroProse Soccer* effectively carved two camps: those who loved isometric, and those who preferred a top-down view. The latter was popular among people who liked to see a good overview of a pitch – one game that utilised this to great effect was *Kick Off* in 1989, which was programmed and designed by Dino Dini.

The game introduced referees who could influence the game. The ball didn't stick to the players' feet – adding a sense of realism – and it included so many elements of the real sport that it endeared itself to purists who loved the injury time and fouling aspects which, together with red and yellow cards and players with personalities, created a revolution.

That led to *Kick Off 2*, which boasted tighter AI and improved graphics. The add-on pack, *Final Whistle*, introduced the offside rule and, although it wasn't altogether successful, it showed the advances being made. *Kick Off 3* was produced

"TO SAY MONEY IS THE ROOT OF THE PRO EVO/FIFA SUCCESS IS TO DO BOTH GAMES A DISSERVICE"



IN ADDITION TO the classic pick-up-and-play football games we all know and love, the football genre would not be the same without the relationship-ending football management games. Sports Interactive has managed to bring the thought-provoking genre into the mainstream like no other developer. We spoke with the legendary Miles Jacobson – the managing director of Sports Interactive, which created the *Championship Manager* series before its split with Eidos and subsequently re-invented the stunning *Football Manager* series…



games™: How does it feel to know that hundreds of thousands of guys eat, drink and sleep *Football Manager* (and previously *Championship Manager* under Sports Interactive)?
Miles Jacobson: Well, I'm one of them so it's nice to know there are as many out there as obsessive as I am! We make our games to entertain, so if people enjoy them we're very happy indeed.

g™: We read once that a *CM2* fan actually got dressed up in a suit and played the national anthem before playing the FA Cup Final on his PC. What are the most entertaining or extreme cases of fan fever that you've heard of?
MJ: That's a true story; the guy is still on our forums. The most extreme I heard about was a guy who threw his computer out of the window after losing a match. According to *Men's Health* magazine, the game has been cited in over 30 divorce cases, too, which is mental. But the most fun for me is still the suited story, or the people who record their own match commentary on games, as though they are on Fanzone. There are quite a few of those.

g™: What's been the single most important/ successful breakthrough you have had with either one of the series?
MJ: It was way back in the early days when the reviews were poor due to the lack of graphics, but the 'one more game' factor spread via word of mouth. Our community has been imperative to the success of all of our games. From a technical point of view the 2D match engine was a massive step forward and very import for our games.

g™: What's the best idea that you have ever come up with?
MJ: Personally speaking I'm very proud of the achievement stuff on the 360, which I worked on with Michael and Nick (two of the code team at SI). It was a lot of fun to do, and even more fun trying to get them all! The majority of design decisions at Sports Interactive are democratic, so original ideas are normally fleshed out a lot by everyone before going in. The worst idea I had was the training scheme in *CM4* – it was overly complicated, and badly designed. I take the blame for that.

g™: And what about your greatest *Championship Manager/Football Manager* management achievement?
MJ: Winning the European Cup with Watford, and the World Cup with England in the same season. 2022 is some way into the future though.

g™: So, Miles, are you a supporter of *Pro Evo* or do you prefer *FIFA*?
MJ: *Pro Evo* for me every time. I prefer *4* to *5*, but that's mainly because I was much better at *4*. I haven't played the last couple of *FIFA*s, but I don't think I'm the target market. Gameplay is more important than Polygons to me.

g™: What are your favourite videogames?
MJ: At the moment I'm mainly playing *Hexic*, *Kameo*, *FM 2006* (all three formats), *Lumines*, *Burnout Revenge* (360), *Guitar Hero*, *Buzz!*, *SingStar*, *OutRun 2* (PSP), *Worms* (PSP) and *Lemmings* (PSP). I've been too scared to put *Oblivion* into my Xbox 360 so far, as I expect it'll take over my life. I play a lot of games so can only really offer current ones that I'm playing. My favourite games of all time are *Starquake* which was on the ZX Spectrum many moons ago and I still dig out my Speccy to play it now and again, and *Landstalker* on the Mega Drive which is apparently coming out on PSP.

as an isometric game by Dini's co-author Steve Screech (Dini had started to write it but left Anco before it was due to be published, and it was eventually released as *Goal!* by Virgin Interactive on the Amiga and Atari ST in 1993), but it failed and was by now facing stiff competition from *Sensible Soccer*.

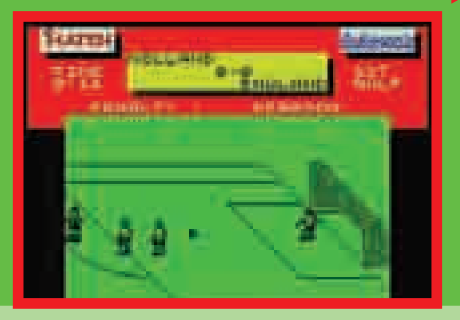
Sensi was a 2D game appearing initially on the Amiga and Atari ST in 1992, and later being converted to the PC and Mega Drive among many other platforms. It spawned the classic sequel *Sensible World Of Soccer* in 1994 – by far the better game – adding decent management elements for an all-round package. Both versions were smash hits. The top-down view, tiny sprites, made-up player names and fictitious football teams may have initially been off-putting to some, but it was addictive and had gamers pinballing the ball from player to player, setting up wonderful goals in fast, furious, end-to-end matches.

But even *Sensible Soccer* was meddled too far. Like *Match Day* and *Kick Off* before it, it couldn't replicate its success on a third outing, and by the time *Sensible Soccer '98* arrived, heralding a move into the 3D era for the franchise, fans cried foul and the series faded away like a wounded old pro. Only now are we seeing a comeback, with *Sensible Soccer 2006* for the Xbox, PlayStation2 and PC (see boxout page 151).

In fact, the early Nineties had seen a sizeable number of iconic games. *Konami Hyper Soccer* was a belting game for the NES with large, good-looking sprites. And even though the controller had just two buttons, it barely constrained the gameplay. It cleverly used the buttons for different purposes depending on where you were and what you were doing – passing and lobbing the ball when in possession, making sliding tackles or headers when not, for example. And with the emphasis on passing, it marked out what would be Konami's gameplay hallmark.

A year later and another classic game emerged, this time for the Mega Drive – the very first *FIFA* licence: *FIFA International Soccer*. The isometric







SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

As well as selling over 16 million *FIFA* games worldwide, EA can also lay claim to breaking many new music acts. *FIFA 2003* introduced Avril Lavigne to European audiences, and The Caesars, Tribalistas, Wir Sind Heldend and Kasabian showed up in *FIFA 2004*. In 2005, Franz Ferdinand, Marcelo D2 and Scissor Sisters all featured. And last year brought us Bloc Party.

For 2006, EA has gone for a world theme including music from the UK's Mattafix and Lady Sovereign, Brazil's Sergio Mendes featuring The Black Eyed Peas, Puerto Rico's Ivy Queen and Trinidad's Kes.

EA's worldwide executive of music Steve Schnur said, "For the World Cup edition, we've spent nearly 12 months putting together an unprecedented collection of tracks from more than 20 countries around the world. It is truly a groundbreaking selection of energy-fuelled songs that we think is the greatest international soundtrack ever".



▲ EA has tracked online communities and independent scenes across the world to bring us a fantastic selection of global tracks.

viewpoint and great graphics wowed gamers, and it started to become clear that the top-down view was on its way out. Krisalis Software's *Manchester United Europe* in 1991, and Rage's *Striker* in 1992 had plumped for it, but by the time *Sensible Soccer* released its final 2D incarnation *Sensible World Of Soccer 96/97* and then the 3D *Sensible Soccer '98*, Jon Hare was the only programmer really holding on. That *FIFA* game was just too strong a lure, although Ritman says, "We talk about realism, but when you look at control you have to wonder how authentic a game controlled by a joystick or pad can be when it represents a real-life situation that is controlled by 11 full bodies. Clearly it can't." He continues, "So the programmer must hand over a lot of control to the CPU. The only question is how much? As an example, the very first version of *FIFA* on the Mega Drive struck me as a touch too easy at the time: so I ran a quick test. I simply kept hitting buttons with my eyes shut. It took under a minute for me to score! I would suggest that this was taking things too far, but I can also see the instant gratification given to the player by this approach. He thinks it is all down to his skill."

Therein, however, came the secret to the *FIFA* arcade games: it was easy to play and score. They also had hundreds of licences all needing to be secured to avoid being sued and the game pulled from the shelves. Licences don't come cheap which is why some developers shy away.

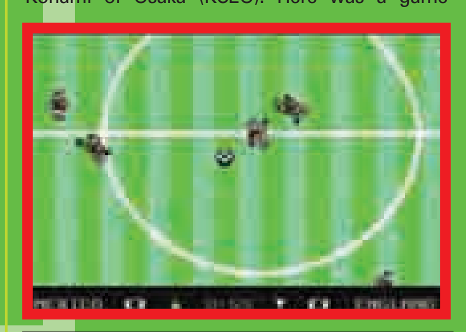
To suggest that money is the root of the *FIFA*/*Pro Evo* dominance is to do both games a disservice (some people say money stopped Sony's poor *This Is Football* series from beating the two frontrunners – a ridiculous claim as this long-running franchise has never been in the same league since making its debut in 1999). That's because the seeds were sown the moment *Perfect Eleven* – to be known as International *Superstar Soccer* in the western world – was launched in Japan for the SNES in 1994 by Konami of Osaka (KCEO). Here was a game with a working radar system, great graphics and a continuation of *Hyper's* slick passing. The sequel to this, *Fighting Eleven* (or *ISS Deluxe* over here), was even better, providing commentary and extra teams. The opposition defences were difficult to penetrate and the goalkeepers were sharp. Your own defence merely marked space and didn't get stuck in until you intervened, putting you in greater control. And the 'jig' function was outstanding allowing you to quickly change direction – even when running – to catch the opposition off guard and potentially set up a one-on-one on the goalie.

The excitement when the Mega Drive got *ISS Deluxe* in 1996 was overwhelming. Yet the flaws in the artificial intelligence and the difficulty in scoring, marred the licence perhaps because KCEO didn't do the conversion. Using a different firm also ruined *Winning Eleven* (*Goal Storm* in the west) for the PlayStation in 1996.

At this time, Gremlin's *Actua Soccer* was a huge hit on the PC and PSOne – it was the first football game that many saw on Sony's machine. But *FIFA* was making inroads and the *ISS* franchise moved apace. It had already stunned with *Perfect Striker* (*ISS 64* internationally) on the N64 – a 3D game which had through-passes – it achieved success with *ISS Pro* on the PlayStation, produced by Konami's Tokyo branch (KCET).

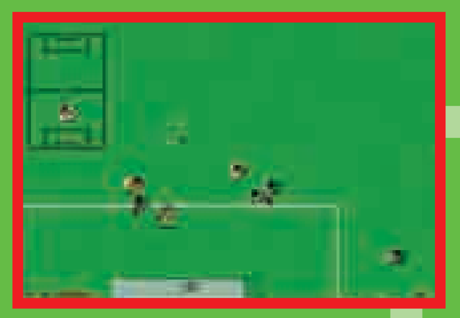
Although the *ISS* games didn't have the licensed rights to use real player names, it made up for it by including some players who looked like their real counterparts (spot the David Seaman lookalike in net for England). The commentary, on the other hand, was awful. In this respect, *FIFA '98: Road To*

▲ *Match Day II* – a veritable footballing masterpiece.



▲ Many a lazy afternoon has been spent with *MicroProse Soccer*.





The World Cup on the PlayStation, Saturn, N64, PC and Game Boy Color had the edge. Named as the best of the series so far, it possessed the licences, the graphics, the commentary and the audio. But *FIFA* later started to look predictable. Everyone expected an impressive opening credit sequence, lots of wonderfully rendered stadia, a plethora of licences covering club and international level, as well as the trademark dry wit of John Motson.

Sometimes the series pulled a rabbit out of the hat – the fast arcade pace of *FIFA '98* providing an exciting game of fast-break opportunities, the advanced artificial intelligence of *FIFA 2001* offering in-depth, multi-button and optioned play on the PlayStation2 – but other times it would offer little in the way of enhancements or depth. *FIFA '95* was an example of this, as was the sluggish *FIFA '97*. According to Matt Bilbey, EA marketing manager at the time of *FIFA 2002*, the developers of *2002* spent just three hours playing it after its release despite the introduction of power bars for shots and passes, and that prompted a kick up the backside for *2003*.

Coder Richard Mackie at Kuju Entertainment, who has been working on the *Sensi* games, says, "My favourite football game is *Pro Evo*, and for me it's down to gameplay rather than graphics. Graphics are important of course, but not as much as player movement, and I've always thought that while *FIFA* looks fantastic, the player movement is rather unrealistic." *ISS* began to firmly establish itself and KCET's *Winning Eleven* series started beating KCEO's titles, with the former producing *ISS Pro Evolution* in 2000 and the latter releasing *ISS 2000* for the N64, the last *ISS* game for this machine. Swiftly following was *ISS Pro Evolution Soccer 2* and then *Pro Evolution Soccer*, dropping the ISS name and effectively marking a split.

Since then *Pro Evo* has matured well, the most notable, shallow difference being the acquisition of licences as time has gone on. Critics point to the steep learning curve of this deep, physics-rich game, but fans say this is the point. The realism of *Pro Evo* marks it out from *FIFA*, and each subsequent game in the series has improved upon the last. Sales also shot up: *Pro Evolution Soccer* eclipsed *FIFA 2003*, and the pair have been locked in battle ever since.

Pro Evo 2 – terrible commentary aside – had better first-time touches than its predecessor, passes were more accurate and the controls were more responsive. Pre-orders for the PS2 version of *Pro Evo 3* topped a million as the series went into hyper-drive and those who secured a copy were overjoyed to see that the game engine had been overhauled making player animations much more fluid – characters' shoulders even dropped when turning. Passing was effortless and by the time *Pro Evo 4* was released the game physics were better than ever with the ball moving convincingly and the graphics turned up a notch.

Then with the latest and best incarnation yet, *Pro Evo 5*, coming closest to recreating the feel of boot on leather and the smell of meat pies on a Saturday afternoon, there remains one question. What now for football games? Ritman suggests, "There's no point in aiming for a soccer simulation. There's no such thing and until someone invents a full body control system there never will be. As for commentaries, television-style on-screen scores and player names, personally I couldn't give a damn, but then the last place you would ever find me is watching a soccer match. Graphics are a different matter. It's clearly best to have the most wonderful images and animation that you can get, but this can clearly get in the way of seeing enough of the pitch. I think the future will come when we're all playing on super high-resolution screens. Then it will become possible to get the best of both worlds."

The evolution of football games over the years has been incredible. And while there have been some not-so-memorable games (*Big League Soccer*, *Footballer Of The Year* and *Gazza's Super Soccer* we're looking at you in particular here) the genre is certainly moving in the right direction, with *Pro Evolution Soccer* leading the way. God bless football.

"PRO EVO 5 COMES CLOSEST TO RECREATING THE FEEL OF BOOT ON LEATHER AND THE SMELL OF MEAT PIES ON A SATURDAY"

Interview: Jon Hare



***PRO EVO* AND *FIFA* may currently be dominating the football videogame industry, but Codemasters has decided to go up against them while reviving an old name in the process. Step up, *Sensible Soccer 2006* and 40 year-old Norwich City fan Jon Hare...**

games™: *Sensible Soccer 2006* doesn't have any flashy features. Why is this?

Jon Hare: Basically, we have become focused on television when discussing reality. We have games with commentaries, on-screen graphics, realistic looking players, perfect animation with everything looking and playing like a televised match. But that depends on how you view reality. Is reality something that is filmed and beamed to a box in the corner of the room, or is it the thought processes which go into actually being in that situation?

g™: Did you contemplate licences for *Sensible Soccer 2006*?

JH: The money we could have spent on licences has been spent on development, and I think it's better for it.

g™: How does it fare against *PES* and *FIFA*?

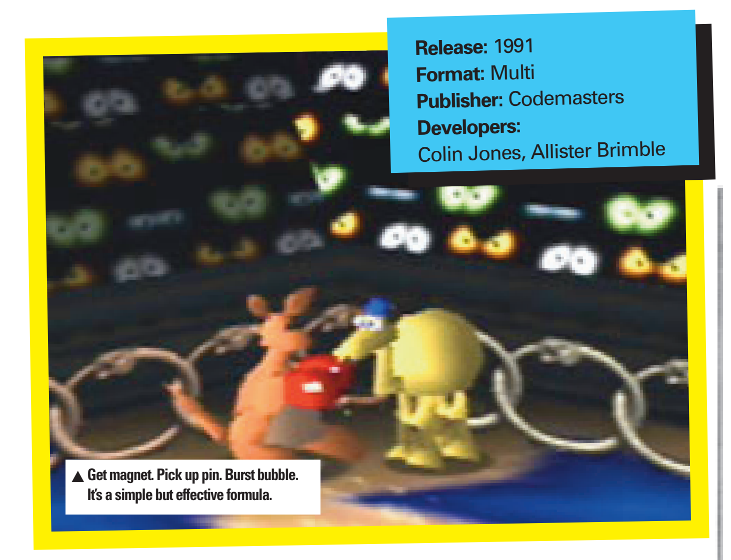
JH: *Sensible Soccer* makes players approach football in a different way. Football games don't give you that spatial awareness or the feeling that you are actually playing a game for real. *Sensible Soccer* keeps your brain working rather than wowing you with graphics; you have to speed up your play, be under pressure. Adrenalin comes when you're on the edge and running on instinct and it's because of that I believe speed is important.



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE





▲ Get magnet. Pick up pin. Burst bubble. It's a simple but effective formula.

Release: 1991
Format: Multi
Publisher: Codemasters
Developers: Colin Jones, Allister Brimble

SLIGHTLY MAGIC

IT'S SO DIZZY OUR HEADS ARE SPINNING

D*izzy* clones were anything but a rarity in the Nineties, in fact, they popped up everywhere, and upon their release many of these copycat titles were groaned at by people who wanted nothing more than the little egg. But when Codemasters released *Slightly Magic* in 1991 it was greeted by a far more positive response than it perhaps deserved seeing as it was exactly the same as the popular *Dizzy* games.

You played a young wizard called Slightly, and in order to save Princess Croak from the sunburnt dragon you had to potter around the screens that made up your kingdom. You also had to collect items that, when matched with other items, allowed you to progress a little further. It was samey, small scale and far easier than the *Dizzy* games, but *Slightly Magic* managed to win over the masses with its simple charm.

By finding different spells and teaming them up with activation items, you could cast a range of spells to overcome certain obstacles. This could be scaring ghosts, curing deafness or turning yourself into a fish or bird, but this sole element of play allowed *Slightly Magic* to separate itself from the clones and become a reputable title. It's just a shame there weren't any sequels – maybe then more people would remember it…

WORST LICENCE EVER

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS – THE TALISMAN OF FATE

Release: 1999
Format: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Titus Software
Developer: Saffire

Games have been around for a long time now, but few can compete with the atrocity that was *Xena: Warrior Princess*. The story was about as clichéd as they come – just check this out… With the Talisman of Fate about to fall into the hands of an evildoer, Xena steps in to save the day. But what's this? The Fates have decided to intervene, and what better way to decide who gets to keep the talisman than a tournament where all the main characters from the show have to fight each other? From this point things got worse. Ropey graphics and cutting-out sound 'complemented' the nightmare gameplay. Poor collision detection hindered you at every turn and although there was a four-player option, nobody had the ability to lure that many friends into the *Xena* trap.

GAMER TRAP!

It sounds harsh, but that's exactly what it was. A trap. A trap filled to the brim with dodgy character animation and some not-so-special moves that took the best part of a weekend to actually perform with any success. Here was a game so poor that it actually made us change the channel when the series it was based around was advertised on TV. A waste of time, money, effort and, ultimately, what could have been a worthy licence.





▲ Have you any idea why someone would inflict this game on another person?



WORLD CUP YEAR 90 COMPILATION [Various Formats] Empire, 1990 – Original UK Advert



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact
If you're into retro gaming and there's something you'd like to share with the gaming public, why not write to us at: games™ Retro Contact, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ. Or email: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

OH, THE IRONY

Dear games™,

While I love the Nintendo DS, I find it somewhat ironic that one of its biggest launch games actually plays far better on Sony's PSP. The game in question is *Super Mario 64*, and thanks to emulation and the PSP's analogue stick I can now play Nintendo's classic platformer the way it was originally intended. Sure, you could use the stylus or the thumb strap, but neither is a decent substitute for a proper stick, and so I decided to trade in my DS version and have now fully embraced the pirate ROM that sits on my PSP memory stick. No doubt you all think I'm a filthy pirate and that I deserve to be brutally stoned to death, but to tell you the truth I really don't care. After all, I now have the definitive portable version of *Mario's* greatest ever adventure.

Benjamin Grant

There's definitely no denying that *Super Mario 64* DS would have greatly benefited from analogue control, but is piracy really the answer? While the PSP's new Nintendo 64 emulator allows you to experience the game as it was originally intended, the emulation is far from perfect and doesn't come with all those excellent mini-games. We'll stick with the DS version thanks.

REMAKE, REMODEL, REPACKAGE REVISITED

Dear games™,

I remember reading a great interview with the guys from Retrospec in one of your earlier magazines, and was wondering if you were planning anything similar in the future? The reason I ask is because I'm a regular visitor of the excellent Retro Remakes website. It has featured some amazing games in the last couple of months, many of which I think are more than worthy of wider attention. A few of the titles that I've been playing recently include *Total Eclipse*, *Warhawk*, *Jet Set Willy 2006*, *3D Ant Attack* and *Project Paradroid* – many are just as good as (if not better than) the originals. I'd love to see a feature or an interview with the likes of *Smila* or the *Ovine Boys* in a later issue. Please make it happen.

Andrew Peters

We're well aware of Retro Remakes, and you're right it really is a great little site. It will be running a remakes competition very shortly, so it may just be the perfect time to feature them in the magazine.

BIG UP THE UNDERDOG

Dear games™,

Good call on the Amstrad games in the buyers' guide recently. If you're actually prepared to do a little digging, you soon realise that there are plenty of CPC titles that are far superior to the C64 and Spectrum versions. When I was back in school, you were more or less treated like a leper if you owned an Amstrad, and so it's great to see that some of my all-time favourite games appeared in the guide. There are plenty of others for a future clash of the titans though. You could include any of the following: *Prince Of Persia*, *Rick Dangerous*, *Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, *Feud*, *Gauntlet*, *Yie Ar Kung Fu*, *Hero Quest* and *Operation Thunderbolt*. These are just a few of my preferences, but *Prince Of Persia* in particular is an amazing conversion and really should get more coverage.

Tony West

Some fine choices there, Tony. We agree wholeheartedly when it comes to *Prince Of Persia*, although we're not too sure about *Hero Quest* and *Operation Thunderbolt*. You're right though, the CPC really was an underrated machine – we blame all those awful Spectrum ports…

THE THIRD DEGREE

Dear games™,

I'm baffled by your continued love of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*. A month doesn't seem to go by when it's not mentioned in the magazine, and I really can't see how you feel that it's better than the far superior *Street Fighter II*. Many of

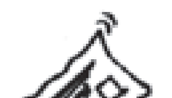
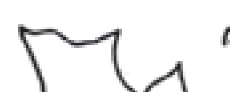


Please note: Owning an Amstrad does not cause leprosy. We think.



games™ would like to confirm that we do not condone actual fighting.



STAR LETTER

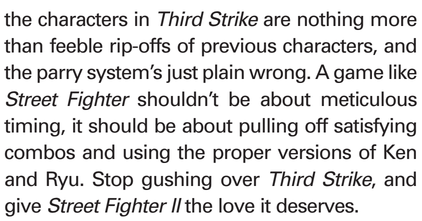
BANDWAGON BANTER

Dear games™,

It would appear that Nintendo may have become the victim of its own success. After stating that the Revolution (I refuse to call it by the naff name Nintendo has now chosen) was to feature classic Nintendo hits, it would now appear that everyone else is going to beat it to the punch. Microsoft is already enjoying success with the excellent Xbox Live Arcade, and it's quite possible that the first PSOne titles will be available for the PSP before Nintendo even gets out of the starting block. This saddens me as I love Nintendo and can't wait to return to titles like *Super Mario Kart*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *Super Smash Brothers* and *Donkey Kong Country*. While the recent announcement about Mega Drive and PC Engine games was great to hear, the most important details (namely price) have yet to be revealed. Also, I can't help but wonder if the ability to download old 8-bit and 16-bit games will put gamers off.

Keith Reid

Don't worry too much, Keith. With fierce competition from Microsoft, and a staggering price point of £425 for the PS3 announced by Sony, Nintendo isn't going to price itself too high. As for your comments about not wanting to play older games, healthy downloads of titles such as *Robotron*, *Gauntlet* and *Smash TV* on Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade service would suggest there's nothing to worry about.



the characters in *Third Strike* are nothing more than feeble rip-offs of previous characters, and the parry system's just plain wrong. A game like *Street Fighter* shouldn't be about meticulous timing, it should be about pulling off satisfying combos and using the proper versions of Ken and Ryu. Stop gushing over *Third Strike*, and give *Street Fighter II* the love it deserves.

A Street Fighter II fan



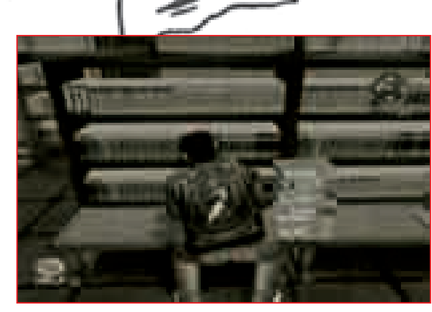
Sod ya! *Street Fighter III: Third Strike* tops *Street Fighter II* hands down!

Ever so sorry, but we don't agree. We'll never deny that *Street Fighter II* played an incredibly important part in the evolution of the 2D beat-'em-up, but to suggest that it's superior to *Street Fighter III: Third Strike* couldn't be more wrong. *Third Strike* is far more balanced (except, of course, for the cheapness of Ken and Chun Li), the parrying system gives the game an enormous sense of depth. Plus, it's nowhere near as laborious to play. Give *Third Strike* another chance and you may just like it.

IN NEED OF CLOSURE

Dear games™,

As I type this letter to you, E3 is only a matter of days away. And you know what that means, don't you? The inevitable *Shenmue III* rumour machine is spluttering into action, and once again I find myself hating Sega a company I once loved. The original two games were both very good (particularly *Shenmue II*), but



Without a conclusion to *Shenmue*, will our readers every find peace?

nowhere near as impressive as had first been boasted. I remember the original stories about how immersive *Shenmue* was going to be, only to realise that Yu Suzuki and Sega had actually lied to me. Yes lied! Luckily, *Shenmue II* was miles better, but all it did was make me yearn for a sequel like some drug-dependent junkie. The last two discs of *Shenmue II* contained some of the best videogame experiences that I have ever had, and it's been agony waiting for the third title in the series. Sega must be raking it in now that it's releasing games on multiple systems, so why the hell can't it finish Ryu's glorious adventure? I need some closure, and if this year's E3 doesn't deliver the news that I've been waiting to hear, then I just don't know what I'll do.

Adam Bishop

We know how you feel, Adam. While we too want a follow-up, we can't ever see it happening. The original games cost millions to make and didn't sell anywhere near as well as Sega had initially hoped, so it's unlikely that we'll ever see a third game (despite what some sites suggest). In an ideal world, Sega would have used E3 to announce that it will be returning to the hardware scene with a second Dreamcast and that the launch titles will include *Shenmue III*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga 2* and *Nights II*. Who are we kidding, eh?







BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35

In a change to our usual Buyers' Guide, this issue we reveal those titles that you should not give the time of day, even if you get them for free. This month we're looking at 8-bit computer licences…

Highlander

Estimated Price: £1-£3
Publisher: Ocean Software

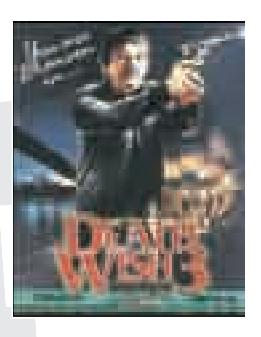
When you realise what Palace Software was able to achieve with *Barbarian* scarcely a year later, it makes you wonder how Ocean was able to make such a spectacular mess of *Highlander*. Hideous visuals, clunky, stilted animation and god-awful sound effects all combined to create a real stinker of a film licence that deserved all the brutal scores it initially received. Granted, you can pick it up for next to nothing nowadays, but there's a good reason for that – it's absolute sodding bobbings! Leave well alone.



Death Wish 3

Estimated Price: £1-£5
Publisher: Gremlin Graphics

The film was a gratuitous piece of garbage, and this 1986 release from Gremlin Graphics is little better. While using a rocket launcher to turn old ladies and prostitutes into quivering masses of flesh is fun, it wears off after about, oh, 20 seconds of play. Chunky, garish visuals, a theme tune that's little more than a painful dirge, and dull repetitive gameplay does nothing to stir your enthusiasm, and unless you're a masochist it's very unlikely that you will get any enjoyment out of this whatsoever. Terrible.



Knight Rider

Estimated Price: £1-£3
Publisher: Ocean Software

Taking the piss out of Ocean's early film licences is like shooting fish in a barrel but, hey, it's entertaining so we're going to carry on doing it regardless. And with that, let's take a little look at *Knight Rider*, a game that's sole redeeming feature is a fairly decent loading screen. Yes, you get to drive around as KITT – we've long forgotten what KITT actually stands for and can't be arsed to look it up – but who cares when the controls make you lurch around like a drunken wino. Pitiful.



The Evil Dead

Estimated Price: £1-£8
Publisher: Palace Software

The film may well be a wonderful piece of cinematic horror, but we're sorry to say that this debut effort from the bowels of Palace Software is little more than a festering piece of shit. Rightfully slated on its release and bearing little resemblance to its illustrious film parent, *The Evil Dead* is pap of the highest possible order, and is about as exciting to play as it is to look at – so, not very then. Even fans of the films will find little to like here although, to be fair, they've had little luck with more recent adaptations.



A View To A Kill

Estimated Price: £1-£3
Publisher: Domark

You have to feel sorry for Her Majesty's most trusted spy; he's certainly appeared in a lot of poor games over the years. The diabolical *A View To A Kill*, though, is easily one of his worst outings, featuring no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Horrendous visuals… check. Bugged gameplay… check. Nightmarish controls that make you want to break your joystick in half… check, check, check. It's all here and adds up to one of the most terrifying licences we've ever had the misfortune to play.



Miami Vice

Estimated Price: £1-£5
Publisher: OceanSoftware

Yet another mis-fire from the guys and gals at Ocean. The television series may have been cooler than a polar bear's nose, but none of the show's charm shone through in the woeful videogame. The garish visuals were just as upsetting as Don Johnson's questionable taste in clothing, and the gameplay was about as painful as watching Phil Collins try his hand at that acting lark. Issue 35 of *Crash* magazine declared it to be 'unplayable twaddle' – our own feelings on the matter are unprintable.



Friday The 13th

Estimated Price: £1-£8
Publisher: Domark

And here we have yet another videogame, based on a horror flick, that failed to do the business when translated across to videogame. While the ideas behind Domark's woeful title are actually fairly good, they're just thrown together in such a haphazard way that they become drowned in a sea of poorly animated sprites and trite gaming clichés. Like the film, it will scare the pants off you, but for completely the wrong reasons. It turned into a rather lovely Oli Frey cover though…



Predator

Estimated Price: £1-£3
Publisher: Activision

We were close to choosing *Red Heat* as our last game, but then we realised it simply had to be *Predator* – after all, Arnie wearing a towel and repeatedly punching Russians was always going to make for a crap game. *Predator*, on the other hand, could have been something really special. One cool idea (running from the Predator's gun sight) couldn't make up for the game's blocky visuals, shambling sprites, limp action and stodgy controls. We'd rather gnaw off our own hands than re-review this. Oops, we just did.





GAZZA II [Various Formats] Empire, 1991 – Original UK Advert


eMag

PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

PS2

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £104.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PS2 is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

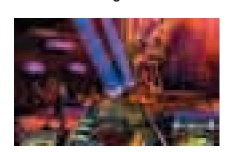
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PS2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi
Dragon Quest VIII IMPORT	Sony	Level-5
God Of War	Sony	In-House
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Rockstar North
Guitar Hero IMPORT	Red Octane	Harmonix
Ico	SCEE	In-House
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House
Rez	Sega	UGA
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House
Soul Calibur III	Sony	Namco
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	In-House
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House

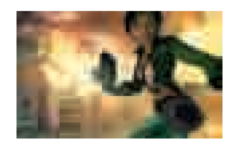
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Soul Calibur III
■ Far too much fun to miss out on, the latest *Soul Calibur* title is one of the best fighters around. Kilik is cheap as always.

Guitar Hero
■ You can't beat a good rock session with *Guitar Hero*. If you have the fingers to handle it, it's one of the finest games ever.



Beyond Good & Evil
■ It may have been overlooked by most, but that doesn't change the fact that Ubisoft provided us with a title that all should experience.



PSP

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 1 September 2005
Media UMD Disc **Current Price** £179.99



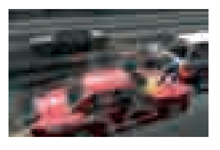
The PSP is a beautiful piece of hardware and its games portfolio has strengthened enormously in the months following the European release. Its gorgeous design and capability to play UMD movies has made it a huge success outside the traditional gaming market, too. Although it's very expensive for a handheld, its multimedia features justify the price.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PSP GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Ape Academy	Sony	In-House
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Exit	Ubisoft	Taito
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment
Madden NFL 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Mega Man Powered Up	Capcom	In-House
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios
Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	In-House
NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	In-House
NFL Street Unleashed	Electronic Arts	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	D3	Now Production
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco
Tokobot	2K Games	Tecmo
Untold Legends	Activision	SOE
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	Sega	Sumo Digital
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House
WWE Smackdown! vs RAW 2006	THQ	Yuke's

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Pursuit Force
■ It may be hard as really hard nails, but to get this much action contained within a PSP is an incredible achievment.



WipEout Pure
■ Futuristic racing somehow seems apt on the PSP and the *WipEout* formula ensures that you're treated to one helluva ride.



Mega Man Powered Up
■ All the toughness of the original *Mega Man* all wrapped up in an adorable new look. If you like platform games, look no further.








EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 13 March 2002
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £99.99



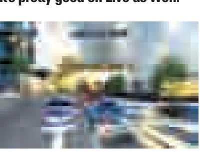
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is 'only a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

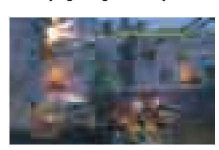
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion Studios
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

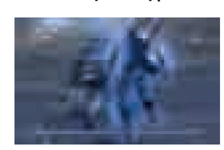
Burnout Revenge
■ Fast, aggressive and hugely entertaining, there's no reason for any gamer to be without this. It's pretty good on Live as well.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
■ People should listen to us more often. Despite being amazing, still not enough people are buying this game. Why?



Ninja Gaiden Black
■ The original version was good, but this update makes the game unmissable. If you have the skills, this is certainly a worthy purchase.



XBOX 360

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 2 December 2005
Media 4.5-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £279.99



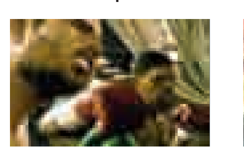
The Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long, but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag. Although we can't help feeling that the best is still to come, the Xbox 360's myriad Live functions and decent selection of first-wave titles make it worth sampling right now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX 360 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amped 3	2K Sports	In-House
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft	In-House
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith
Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Tecmo
FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House
Geometry Wars 2	Live Arcade	Bizarre Creations
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House
Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Rare
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	Crystal Dynamics
Marble Blast Ultra	Live Arcade	Garage Games Inc
NBA 2K6	2K Sports	In-House
Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	In-House
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
Quake 4	Activision	id Software
Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Namco
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Bethesda

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

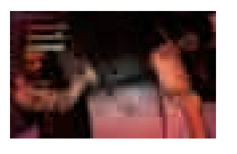
Fight Night: Round 3
■ Punching a man really hard in the face has never before been this much fun – and it's probably never looked this painful.



Kameo: Elements Of Power
■ Rare does good once again with an enchanting tale of fairies and trolls. Things that look this cute are always good.



Condemned: Criminal Origins
■ You like the dark? You like being scared? Then you'll like being freaked out by this awesome title. You'll never find all the birds. Never.

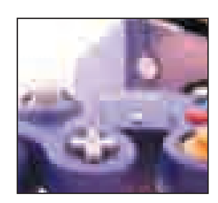


ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £79.99



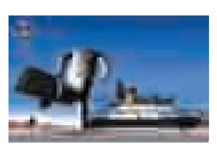
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle up against the other consoles, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth taking a look at. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

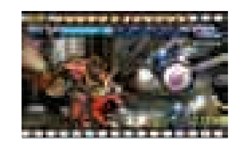
Title	Publisher	Developer
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth
Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	Skip
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
killer7	Capcom	In-House
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

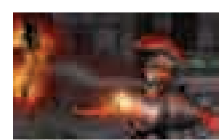
killer7
■ **Many may feel otherwise, but for us this twisted tale is one of the most stylish games around. Just give it a chance.**



Viewtiful Joe 2
■ **You thought the first game was tough? Well this one's really going to test you. Stylish and generally awesome.**

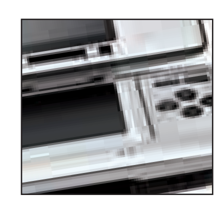


Eternal Darkness
■ **The horror genre has always been popular, but the 'insanity' effects in this title really set it apart from the crowd.**



DS

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 11 March 2005
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



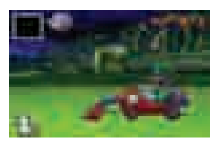
Chances are, you'll either already be completely in love with Nintendo's newest handheld or you'll have hated it from the start. The DS has dismissed misconceptions about it being nothing more than a gimmick by giving us a number of excellent games over the past year, and its affordability and accessibility have given it a sizeable advantage over the PSP.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE DS GAMES

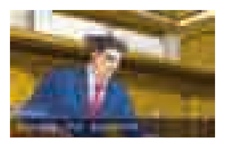
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House
Another Code	Nintendo	Jinx
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs
Lost In Blue	Konami	In-House
Mario And Luigi: Partners In Time	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment
Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	Fuse Games
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom
Sonic Rush	Sega	In-House
Tony Hawk's American Sk8land	Activision	Vicarious Visions
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Atlus	Atlus
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Clover
Wario Ware Touch	Nintendo	In-House
Yoshi Touch And Go	Nintendo	In-House
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

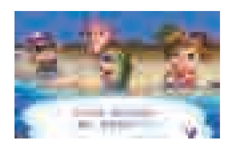
Mario Kart DS
■ **The *Mario Kart* series has impressed every step of the way and the DS version is no exeception. Pure genius.**

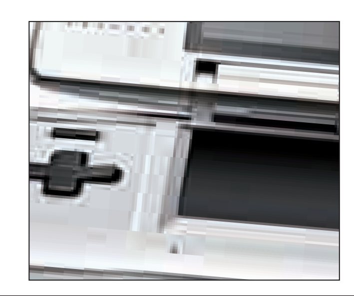


Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney
■ **Ever fancied playing a lawyer? Well, now you can. It's innovation like this that makes Nintendo the best at what it does.**



Animal Crossing: Wild World
■ **It may be a little similar to the GameCube version, but having your own world in the palm of your hand couldn't work any better.**





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GBA GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

TLOZ: The Minish Cap
More from our favourite little green hero as he gains the ability to become really small. Delightful, as you'd expect.



Astro Boy: Omega Factor
Platform games on the GBA work a treat, so it really comes as no surprise that an *Astro Boy* game works so well.



WarioWare: Twisted!
It's a collection of mini-games with a twist. Lots of entertainment and one of the strangest things you can do on the bus.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



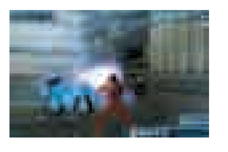
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2006	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004: Editor's Choice Edition	Atari	Digital Extremes
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

City Of Heroes
Everyone at some point has wanted to be a superhero, and *COH* allows you your chance to be not only super, but part of a super team.

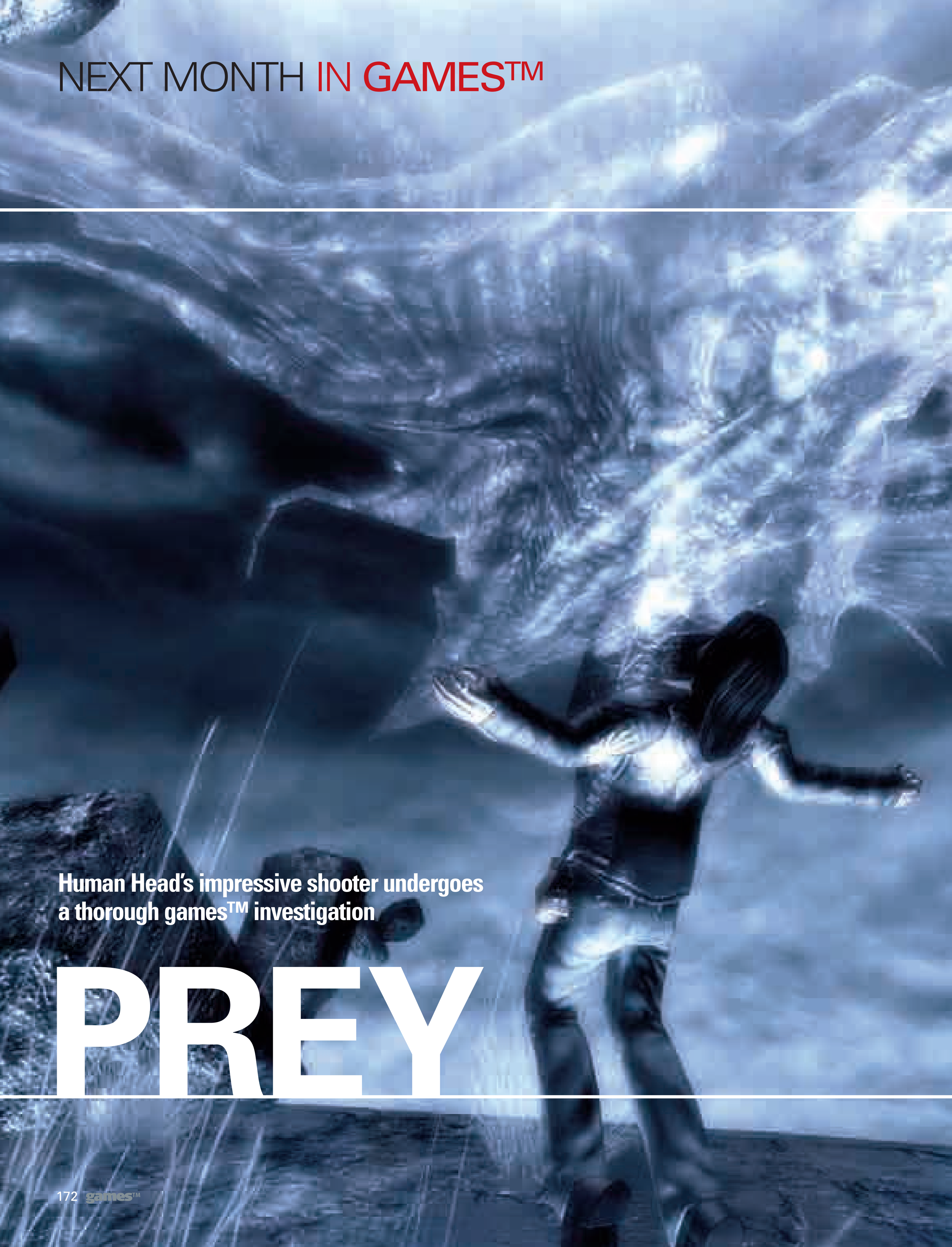


Sam & Max Hit The Road
One dog and his rabbit head out to save the day in one of the funniest point 'n' click adventure games in existence.



Guild Wars
There are few better ways to spend a couple of hundred hours. Well, there are, but few of those ways are more enjoyable.





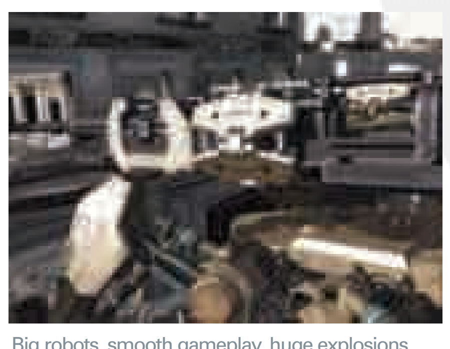
NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

Human Head's impressive shooter undergoes a thorough games™ investigation

PREY



NEXT MONTH

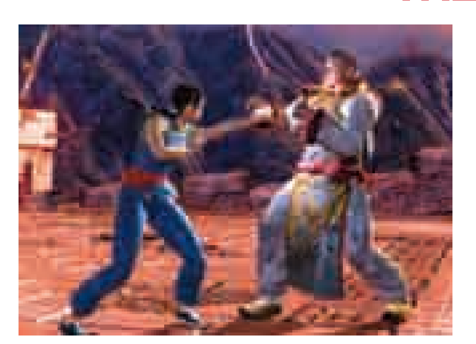


Big robots, smooth gameplay, huge explosions. From Software's latest goes under the microscope.

MORE… REVIEWS

It's been one hell of a long time coming, but next month finally sees 2K Games' monstrous shooter *Prey* coming up for the **games™** review. If we can escape its labyrinthine spaceship in time, we should be giving you the lowdown on *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*, the jubilant *LocoRoco* and Sega mega-mech title *Chromehounds*.

"THE MORE WE SEE OF CHROMEHOUNDS, THE MORE WE WANT IT"



The fifth *Virtua Fighter* is every bit as beautiful as we'd hoped.

MORE… PREVIEWS

As if our E3 coverage wasn't enough, we'll be taking in depth looks at Electronic Arts' brand new IP *Army Of Two* next month, as well as squaring up to *Virtua Fighter 5* and stepping back into *Silent Hill* in the PSP's *Origins*. With Nintendo Wii and PlayStation3 updates to come too, the preview machine isn't showing any signs of slowing.

"OUR DEFINITIVE LOOK AT THE MULTI-COLOURED VIDEOGAME CANON"



Just a few bars of this stage's music is enough to get our juices flowing.

MORE… FEATURES

The **games™** bible continues its unstoppable assault on games journalism next month as we pick apart the fighting genre, leaving no stone unturned. Throw in our usual high-calibre interviews, thought provoking feature pieces, as well as a healthy dose of retro gaming, and you simply can't go wrong. We do look after you…





CONTACT

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Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

I LOVE GAMERS who refuse to admit they're gamers – you know, the kind who wander into game stores and pretend they're lost, attempting to find their way out while cracking a brief look at the PS2 chart. I worked at such a store and saw a lot of them.

Now, I'm something of a geek when it comes to Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* (I write for their website and beta tested *FM06*), so when a 30 year-old balding man came over, enquiring about the latest 'footy manager game', I was happy to help. I gave my usual blurb about the history of *Football Manager*, however, this man had clearly been living in a hole – two years on from the Eidos split, he still refused to believe that *FM06* was the successor to the older *Championship Manager* games. After reading the eloquent PR blurb on the box, he even protested how good *CM5* was. The fool then bought it, totally ignoring my advice.

What bothered me wasn't his eventual decision, it was that, after arguing with me, he left the shop pretending he'd never played a game in his life. In fact, I half hoped his friends might walk past the shop so I could watch him attempt to hide near the pre-owned baskets. Surely, if you have the energy to have a half-arsed debate with me in a store, at least have the balls to admit to yourself that you do, in fact, play games. Hell, you might even enjoy the experience more if you do.

Tom Roddison

games™: We're as used to blind ignorance as any serious gamer, but you raise an interesting point – do people really lie to themselves about being gamers? We'd say it was the other way around. Your customer seemed to be kidding himself that he actually knew what he was on about rather than that he wasn't a gamer. More and more people are embracing our hobby as a valid way to spend time, and socially, certainly, games haven't been 'uncool' for quite some time. Still, we work in an office full of informed and passionate gamers, so maybe we're the ones kidding ourselves about mainstream attitudes.

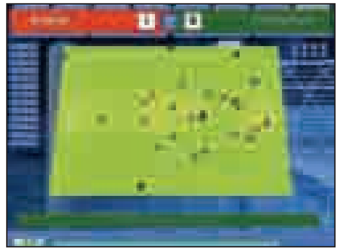
INSPIRED BY THE 'Bargains' thread on the **games™** forum, I thought I'd share a thought on the way games are priced: it's nuts. Most games on the high-street have barely been out any time at all, yet they've now depreciated to as low as a third of their initial price – all within a few months of being release. I can't help but wonder, how can distributors and chains justify charging up to £45 for a new game that you can pick up for less than a third of that in a few months?

Why not just start at a reasonable price? All these bargains must hurt the sales of new titles as they come out. Do you want the latest great game, or do you want three really good games from only a few months back for the same price? Or even more than that if you're prepared to buy second hand?

'Dangerboyjim', via the forum

games™: We couldn't agree more. Especially with 360 games, high-street prices border on extortionate – our favourite local independent retailer will give us ten games for £100 if we're prepared to wait a few months, not two; indeed, it makes gaming seem like a prohibitively expensive hobby. We'd be happy

"WITH THE NEXT GEN, NEVER BEFORE HAS THE GAMER'S CHOICE BEEN SO DIFFICULT. A TIME OF PROSPERITY THIS MAY BE, BUT WHY DO I FEEL LIKE WHICHEVER ONE I CHOOSE I'LL BE MISSING OUT ON SOMETHING LIFE ALTERING?"



Champ Man 5 – famously not by the same development team as previous instalments and, consequently, rubbish.



Please, Nintendo Wii, don't disappoint us; not now, after we've talked you up so very much.

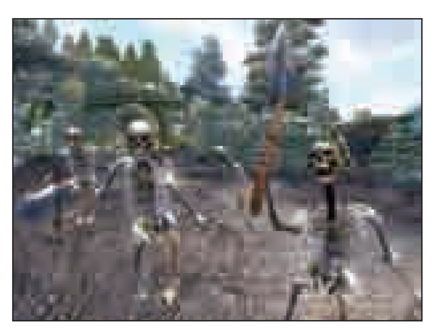
Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk**





See, now the Xbox 360 has the excellence of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*…



… but the PS3's going to have *Metal Gear* and *Devil May Cry* – we've never been so agonisingly spoilt for choice.

with a consistent £30 price point as opposed to this £40-£60 nonsense followed by months of fluctuation. Really, though, it's all to do with demand – even pre-owned – which stores love because all the profit goes directly to them – newer and more desirable games still push £40. As long as people want to buy particular games, retailers are going to take advantage of that trend.

I'VE BEEN A regular reader of **games™** for about two and a half years now and have always found the magazine to be well written with an excellent, dry sense of humour. You haven't steered me wrong yet, and now I need your help.

A friend of mine has been showing off his new Xbox 360, and I have to say I was thoroughly underwhelmed. It was not the all-conquering behemoth of awesome I was led to believe it was. I get the impression it was rushed out for Christmas in a half-finished state. Having never 'clicked' with the original Xbox I'm more excited at the prospect of the PS3 and the bizarrely named Wii. I'll only be in a position to buy one next-generation console as I have a house and a car that seem to consume money like it's going out of fashion, so my question is which should I buy?

Do I go for the Xbox 360 in the hope that it will make that leap forward due to its apparent development ease support? Do I hold out for the PS3, safe in the knowledge that (PS2 HDD aside) Sony hasn't let me down yet and, if we believe Ken Kutaragi, because it should be stonkingly good? Or do I remember the NES and hope that Nintendo, with its funky controller and determination to be different, will make the Wii the most fun thing to play?

Never before has the gamer's choice been so difficult. A time of prosperity this may be, but why do I feel like whichever one I choose I'll be missing out on something life altering?
Alex Merrall

games™: We feel your pain, Alex. Our tiny paycheques frequently buckle under the expense of our gaming passion. Sadly, at the time of writing, we're in no position to help – we don't know any more about the consoles or how they'll turn out than you do. However, games have certainly never looked so good, and no new wave of consoles has ever attracted more mainstream attention. As with previous generations, we reckon it'll all come down to personal taste – that, or waiting until the major players are engaged in a price war and cashing in on the consequent price cuts.

FIRST, I'D LIKE to point out that I don't favour a particular platform or manufacture. I have most of the machines

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E3 Over 2U

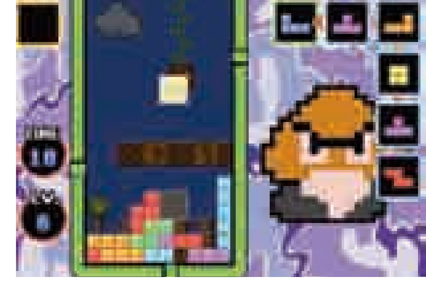
We have an entire magazine in which to let you know what we thought about the Electronic Entertainment Expo 2006, so what did YOU think? Here are some reactions from our forum where Nintendo's show has been a big hit and Microsoft hasn't seen so much as a mention…

Blair Thorburn
The PS3 seemed somewhat underwhelming after Sony's claims at last year's event, but Quantic Dream's tech demo for *Heavy Rain* was excellent and, if reflective of its next game, shows a lot of promise for fans of the cinematic adventure.

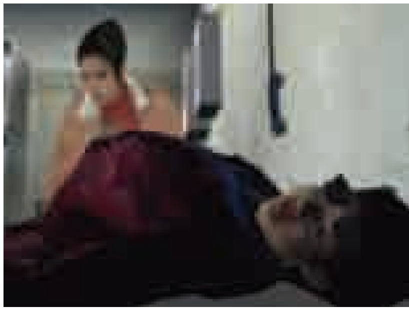
Psychobob
I do like the concept of the Nintendo Wii but – although I can't pass judgement until I've played it – it did seem a tad impractical. I shouldn't think there'll be a problem trying to play less physically demanding games like *Red Steel* or *Sonic Wild Fire*, but multi-player games such as tennis will be difficult to play if restricted to a small area.

the_amazing_maurice
The Wii announcements were definitely the big thing for me. The motion sensor technology seems to be a huge gamble on Nintendo's part. If this machine flops spectacularly then you'd be inclined to think it'll be the company's last foray into the home console market.

amipal
I expected to be blown away by Sony's presentation. I was not. The whole thing seemed staged, with pauses ready for audience 'whoops' that never came. Nintendo's Wii conference, on the other hand, was top class.



If all you want to do in a game is beat a high score, there's always *Tetris DS* which is out now.



The cinematic wonder that is *Fahrenheit* – anything but violence for violence's sake.

available at the moment, and have been a follower of computer games since the 8-bit era. Back then, the main goal of a game was simple: get the highest score. Nowadays, it's rarely a score that we're trying to beat – usually we're trying to get to the end of a game (which takes a lot of time). Now, I'm not going to harp on about how Spectrum titles were better than what we have these days, but I do think we've reached a point where games are too complicated. The truth is, I have less time to get involved in games these days and I just want to be able to pick up and play for a while.

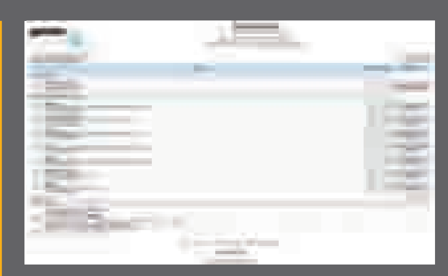
My main problem with today's games is not their length – it's the way you control the characters. In the Spectrum era all you needed to do was move up, down, left, right and fire; this was fine on the keyboard or joystick, but nowadays we have to crouch, lean round corners, change items, rotate 360 degrees, short jump, long jump – all sorts. And although game developers do their best with the controllers we have, it all seems a bit artificial. Games look the part today – from screenshots, we can imagine being in the game doing what the character does – but in reality we don't feel as immersed as we ought to. We need to change the way we play games. I feel this is where the limits are now – it's not in the graphics, but in the controllers. I'm looking forward to seeing what Nintendo is planning for its Wii controller – whatever happens to it, it's a step in the right direction.
Paul Milne

games™: You're right to point to the Wii as a potential embodiment of your point of view, Paul – the DS also favours pick-up-and-play and a simple interface over the complexities of modern gaming. We wouldn't, however, agree that games are too complicated, we'd say that rather than dumbing games down, simpler games need to be made in addition to what we already have – and this is Nintendo's current strategy. In four years, we see gaming as having something for everyone, encompassing everything from the most in-depth war sims to the simplest concepts to the most artistic and innovative projects – a breadth and variety that, today, is lacking.

I RECENTLY FINISHED *Fahrenheit*, and loved every moment (except for those stealth bits). I felt the game was a huge step toward a more cinematic experience – in fact, *Fahrenheit* is the kind of game I'd like to play with my little sister, who's just discovered games via *Nintendogs* and *Animal Crossing*.

I want her to see the possibilities of gaming beyond *Super Monkey Ball* and *Ratchet & Clank 3*, to see the magic of a medium that is evolving before our eyes, creating experiences





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FROM THE FORUM

OUR MEMBERS' GREAT FMV MOMENTS

that other media cannot. But I couldn't show *Fahrenheit* to my sister. Why? Because of the copious amounts of sex and violence.

I'm not saying that sex and violence have no place in games; it just feels like, in an effort to appear credible and mature, games such as *Fahrenheit* need an age rating to justify themselves. If games lost their inhibitions about what sells and what doesn't, and what readers of magazines like **games™** will think of them if they put in or leave out a sex scene, and thought of my sister, and her narrow view of the gaming spectrum, I think the future of videogames would be a lot more secure. Otherwise, if all I can play with my sister is average platformers, I worry that's all we'll see.
James Searle

games™: We'd agree with you entirely were it not for the fact that you use *Fahrenheit* as your example – a game that, in our opinion, uses sex and violence in a perfectly justified way. No scene in the game is 'violence for violence's sake'; everything works in context, and the dark storyline incorporates such scenes naturally. But *Fahrenheit* is one of the only titles to treat such themes with maturity – it's a game for adults, and shouldn't be penalised because it isn't appropriate for younger gamers. The *Zelda* series especially showcases the potential, wonder and continuous evolution of videogames without incorporating mature themes, and they're no worse for it. Perhaps such titles would be a more appropriate introduction to the true depth of gaming for your little sister – she has plenty of time to discover *Fahrenheit* when she's older.

THIS MONTH, AS I'm sure you're aware, saw Bethesda release a downloadable add-on for *Oblivion*. It consisted of two suits of horse armour at a cost of 200 Microsoft Points (£1.70), and quickly caused a backlash on Internet forums.

The idea that a developer can create and sell extra content is initially appealing, and many gamers will happily pay to expand their favourite games. However, what's stopping the developer removing part of the original game (which seems to have occurred here – before *Oblivion* was released, some screenshots showed horse armour) only to sell it at a later date? Is this just a sneaky way to increase the cost of games by charging us for stuff that should have been included in the first place?

These downloads are currently the videogame equivalent of a ring tone, but I fear it won't be long before a greedy developer decides to remove the last few levels of a game and sell them as extra content a week later.
John Stuart

games™: This is a concern that has also crossed our minds, and is something that PC gamers have been experiencing for a while. Looking at *The Sims 2* when it first came out, for instance, with its paltry selection of items and obvious design restrictions, it was entirely obvious that EA held back content to spur sales of the inevitable flood of expansion packs that has already crested on the horizon. It's easy to imagine publishers cashing in on such a flexible method of content distribution – hell, we're half expecting the ending to *Halo 2* to surface on Xbox Live Marketplace some day soon.

"I WANT MY LITTLE SISTER **TO SEE THE POSSIBILITIES OF GAMING** BEYOND RATCHET & CLANK 3, TO SEE **THE MAGIC OF A MEDIUM** THAT'S **EVOLVING** BEFORE OUR EYES, CREATING EXPERIENCES THAT **OTHER MEDIA CANNOT"**

Simonista
I decided to go back to the wonderful *Final Fantasy VIII*, and it made me realise it has the best intro video I've ever seen in gaming. The music is strong and atmospheric and its emotional and intense sequences are the best.

Another amazing intro was the one for *Soul Reaver*, it made you so angry at Kain it was great. What's everyone else's favourite cut-scene/FMV/intro sequence?

Gemini-Phoenix
Soul Reaver intro has to be the all-time greatest in my opinion. I can also think of a few great cut-scenes throughout the *Final Fantasy* series, with *FFIX* being my favourite (The Tantalus ship flying through the gates of the city is one that sticks out in my mind). And who can forget that moving moment at the end of the first disc of *FFVII*? Also, the intro to *Broken Sword II* is an all-time great.

I would also nominate *Colony Wars III: Red Sun*. Why on Earth they haven't turned this into a movie/TV series, I do not know. I also love *Dino Crisis II* as well. *Parasite Eve II* has some memorable scenes in it too…

tweeter
Too many to list, but one of my favourites has to be the introduction sequence from *Silent Hill 2*. It's just the way he looks into the mirror – you can almost feel what he's got going on in his head. Another fave from that one is the scene with Maria in the prison cell – the subtle differences when she 'switches' from Maria to Mary are excellent.

Condemned has some very memorable FMV scenes – particularly effective was the mannequins in the department store, or any of those that utilise the black and white grainy effect.

Searly
Onimusha 3 for me – it just gripped me and wouldn't let go! Other than that, the opening from *Kingdom Hearts and* Yuna's dance from *FFX* – predictable, but still a great scene. I also have a soft spot for everything from *Gitaroo Man*, although the simply awful cut-scenes from *Mad Maestro* (*Bravo Music* in Japan) run it close for sheer lack of quality.

gormless
The intro movie (actual graphics not FMV I might add) on the original *Soul Calibur* on Dreamcast. It absolutely blew me away a few years ago, and even digging it out recently and having a look at it now reveals a game that hasn't really aged at all. I loved how the movie changed as you unlocked the new characters.


games™